STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Oakland Organizes to End Unjust Evictions

"These corporate landlords come in, buy entire buildings, and kick everyone, including children and elderly persons, out of the building at once. That's because they see an opportunity to make a profit." — Phil Rapier, Oakland tenant attorney

by Joyce Cutler

An Oakland waitress successfully sued her landlord for trying to evict her, but her lawyer says the case would not have happened in the first place if the landlord was required to give Just Cause for evictions.

Annette Flowers, a waitress at Art's Crab Shack, has lived in her East Oakland apartment since 1998, said Laura Lane, an attorney with the East Bay Community Law Center. The landlord, also an attorney, in the last year has given a number of tenants living in his 40 units of rental housing eviction notices after he "coerced them into signing new leases that are fixed-term," Lane said.

Flowers and other tenants were given leases of various lengths. Flowers was given a five-month lease. At the end of five months in December 2001, the landlord said if Flowers didn't sign the lease he would give her a 30-day notice, Lane said.

"To say I'm going to give you a 30-day notice unless you sign is arguably legal because you can give a 30-day notice," Lane said. "He tried to evict her pursuant to fixed-term lease. The jury found he exerted undue influence to get her to sign the lease but also retaliated against her" for requesting repairs.

Alameda County jurors deliberated less than three hours after a four-day trial to find in favor of Flowers. "What she wins is the right to stay and pay her rent," Lane said.

The landlord, however, is not giving up and has filed a motion for a new judgment or a new trial. "She's still sort of living in terror," and has developed heart problems since the troubles began, said Lane.

Lane argues that what the landlord did was "scheme to evict these people and be able to raise the rent on the next tenants."

But that scheme would have failed, she said, if the landlord had to state a reason for the eviction. "He would have had to state a reason for evicting her instead of just giving her a no-cause eviction and then, when he doesn't have a good reason for evicting her, he wouldn't be able to," Lane said.

The tenant was able to prove the landlord was retaliating against her, "but that's very hard to prove," Lane said, adding that the burden should be on the landlord to state a reason before filing an eviction.

Fun and Games with Landlords

Phil Rapier, a tenant attorney in Oakland, said the shenanigans landlord attorneys are pulling are unprecedented.

"One of the things we're seeing now is

See **Just Cause Campaign** *page 17*



Oakland attorney Phil Rapier (*left*) joins tenants in symbolically evicting Mayor Jerry Brown for failing to protect renters from abusive landlords. Alex Salazar photo



A spirited rally at Oakland rally celebrated the Just Cause campaign. The banner declares: "*Just Cause Oakland: We Will Not Be Moved.*" Alex Salazar photo

False Claims of Medical Support for Care Not Cash

by Carol Harvey

Some medical experts and homeless advocates fear that the real agenda of S.F. Supervisor Gavin Newsom's "Care Not Cash" initiative is to change the relationship between care providers and those who need services. The assumption is that if you lack money or a home, you are less than a full San Francisco citizen. You are a miserable supplicant, a child. You no longer have disposable income to determine your own life choices. You must go here, do this or that, follow these orders.

Newsom has cozied up to the medical community, attempting to give Care Not Cash the patina of approval by physician "experts." He has twice hijacked logos from *The New England Journal of Medicine* and the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic, and drawn invalid medical conclusions from Rand organization studies.

San Francisco Weekly reporter Peter Byrne reported in his column on September 18 that the *New England Journal of Medicine* is upset with Supervisor Newsom for laying false claim to their support for his Care Not Cash proposal by using their logo on his campaign materials without their consent.



Religious Witness with Homeless People rallies at S.F. City Hall against "Care Not Cash." A likeness of St. Francis appeals for compassion for the poor. Lydia Gans photo

Joseph Elson, M.D., of the Haight Ashbury Free Clinic (HAFCI), cited the Care Not Cash website for presenting false claims of support from the San Francisco medical community and the Free Clinic. Newsom generalized from only one supportive psychiatrist, Dr. Pablo Stewart, to falsely claim support from the entire organization. "There is little support for 'Care Not Cash' among people who provide direct care for the homeless," Dr. Elson stated.

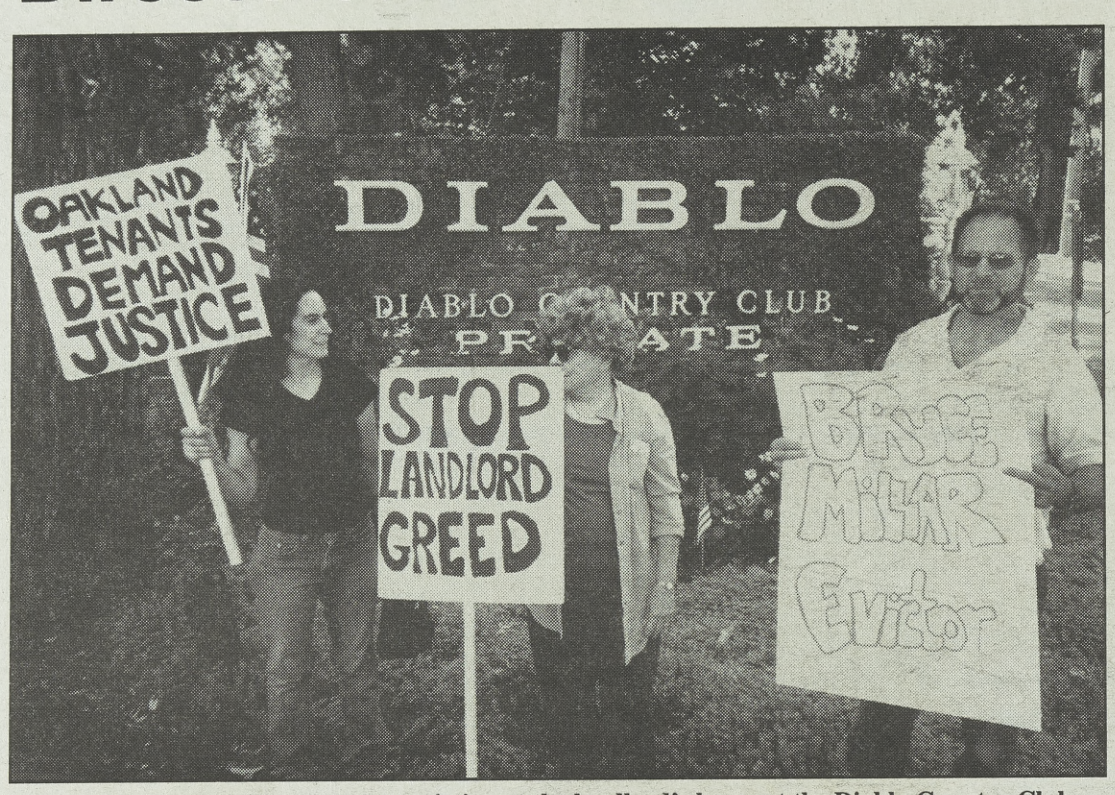
Dr. Elson expressed concern that Care Not Cash provides no care, despite its title. "That is why providers who work to take people out of homelessness do not support this proposal and why it will not work."

Haight Ashbury Free Clinic staff began monitoring Newsom's website months ago when they discovered Care Not Cash had linked itself to the Free Clinic and usurped their dove logo. Dr. Darryl Inaba, CEO of the HAFCI, requested Newsom remove their logo from his website.

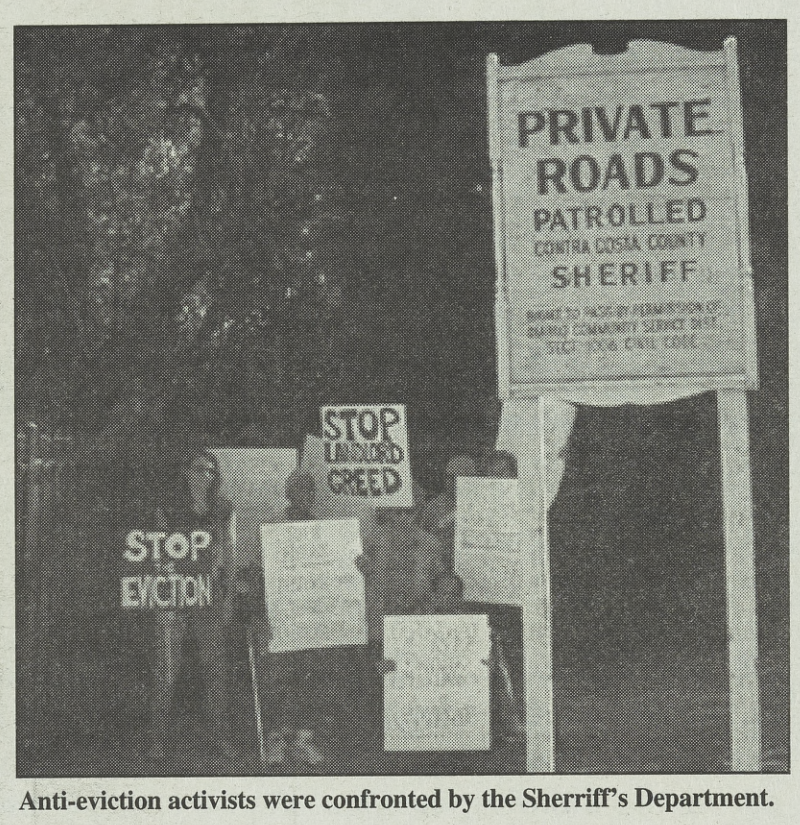
Dr. Elson said in an interview, "I am not convinced that Gavin Newsom's proposal has the best thoughts of the homeless in mind. From my understanding of Care Not

See **Gavin Newsom's False Claims** *page eight*

Direct Action Halts Landlord Abuses in Oakland



Oakland tenant activists protest an eviction at the landlord's home at the Diablo Country Club.



Anti-eviction activists were confronted by the Sherriff's Department.

by Lynda Carson

In a time of forced relocations of the poor out of Oakland, a little-known group continues to forge campaigns that stir up the hearts and minds of Oakland renters. Campaign for Renters Rights, a small group of dedicated volunteers, has been fighting successfully against evictions out in the streets with interventions and direct action, rather than in the stuffy courtrooms of a rigged system.

Case in point: Lorraine Key, a 73-year-old Oakland resident, recently faced eviction after 36 years of residency in the same apartment unit, and decided to fight for her right to stay where she was. Key was sharp enough to hire attorneys of the *Eviction Defense Center to help fight her* battle; and then she turned to the Campaign for Renters Rights (CRR), to take her battle to the streets.

In short order, the landlord gave in and dropped the eviction after a few members of the CRR made contact with him. Case dismissed, and the eviction never made it to the courts. Key now is an active member of the CRR, helping others to fight their battles against greedy landlords.

During the past few years, Oakland resident Malika Nassarrudin, a mother of two, called upon the CRR to join her in a battle to fight eviction attempts made against her. The fights against both evictions were a success, and neither move to evict her and her family ever made it out of the courts and into the Sheriff's Department.

During her latest battle, CRR members quietly slipped into a large, three-story Berkeley office building owned by her landlord and, armed with a bullhorn, they threatened to roam the halls knocking on doors to alert all their clients about the plight of the tenant being evicted. The Albany Police showed up, but by then the action was over.

The stunned agent for the landlord had already signed a statement to drop the eviction, and even apologized in writing to the tenant for the inconvenience. Ms. Nassarrudin remains an active member of the CRR, and shows up at the monthly meetings to offer support.

If these monthly meetings are an indication of its vibrancy, the ranks of the CRR are growing month by month, with 35 to 40 people showing up at their last meeting. More and more victims of the landlords seek the CRR for help as part of their strategy to fight their battles against evictions; and they, in turn, help others to fight their evictions with a form of intervention and direct action.

The Campaign for Renters Rights is helping tenants fight evictions with a form of intervention and direct action. *Oakland landlords* have not yet grasped the significance of what occurs here. Victims of the landlords are learning how to fight back before their eviction case hits the courts.

Oakland landlords have not yet grasped the significance of what occurs here. Victims of the landlords are uniting and learning how to fight back before their eviction case hits the courts.

Wealthy landlord Bruce Millar of Diablo, California, is one of the latest to find the CRR in 15 of his properties leaving flyers and organizing his tenants against the eviction of long-term renter Doris Stancil. On September 11, CRR members were chased out of Millar's 'hood in Diablo by Lieutenant R. Ernest Templeton of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department as they were heading from palace to palace with flyers to expose Millar's attempt to profit by evicting Stancil.

CRR members were at first accused of soliciting by Officer Templeton, until he read the flyer; then he suddenly claimed the CRR members were breaking the law by trespassing on private property, and that he had received complaints.

Indeed, to defend Stancil, CRR members risked arrest by heading onto the private Diablo Country Club of Millar and his wealthy neighbors in an effort to keep Stancil in her home. Only days before that action, they organized a phone blitz of people to call Millar's private home number to ask about the well-being of Stancil.

Doris Stancil is an elderly, disabled woman who has lived at 35 Monte Vista Avenue in Oakland for more than 10 years. She has contributed much to the community, and at one time was the Executive Secretary of the East Bay-Rainbow Push Coalition. A good tenant, Stancil was one of many elderly renters who resided at the property when she first moved into that location. Now, she is one of the last remaining after the rest faced evictions by Millar.

Recently, when seeking repairs from her landlord, Bruce Millar, for a worn and damaged kitchen floor, he allegedly made the comment that she paid "cheap rent" and declined to do repairs. Her rent is $658.00 per month. Soon, Stancil was led to believe that Millar wanted to raise the rent to $800.00 per month or more, far above Oakland's rent cap for annual rent increases. Stancil then received a 30-Day Notice to move after refusing to pay the illegal rent increase. She then refused to move, choosing to fight the eviction.

During the past few months, someone has been poisoning Stancil's outdoor plants, and repeatedly calling her only to hang up when she answers the phone. She states that she has never had heat in her apartment because Millar failed to repair a leaking gas heater, and is now being blacklisted by having an eviction on her record. It is a very grim situation. Stancil sought the help of the CRR to fight her eviction.

On Sunday, September 15, numerous members of the CRR joined Stancil for a picket at the entrance of the Diablo Country Club, where landlord Millar resides. According to Rob Rooke, a founder of the CRR, it was a hopeful event since many of Millar's neighbors now appear to be aware of the plight of Stancil. This time, two cars from the Sheriff's Department showed up to keep an eye on the members of the CRR.

During recent interviews with Bruce Millar and his wife Sue, it became apparent that they tried their best to conceal their economic motive to evict as they painted an

See **Direct Action Halts Evictions** *page 18*

Street Spirit

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Editor, Layout, Design: Terry Messman

Contributors: Claire J. Baker, Hans Bennett, Lynda Carson, Joyce Cutler, Ellen Danchik, Sister Bernie Galvin, Lydia Gans, Maureen Hartmann, Carol Harvey, A. Faye Hicks, Jim Hightower, Robert Lentz, Tomas McCabe, Kevin McFarren, Robert M. Myers, Robert Norse, Christa Occhiogrosso, Alan Pogue, PoorNewsNetwork, Eric Robertson, Alex Salazar, Valerie Schwartz, S.F. Print Collective, Holly Sklar, Meredith Stout

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Write to: **Terry Messman, Street Spirit, 65 Ninth St., San Francisco, CA 94103-1401.**
Phone: **415/565-0201.** Fax: **415/565-0204**
E-mail to: **spirit@afsc.org**

American Friends Service Committee

Street Spirit is a publication of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). AFSC was founded by Quakers in 1917 to provide conscientious objectors an opportunity to aid civilian victims during World War I. Today it carries on programs of service, social justice, and peace education in 22 foreign countries and 43 areas in the United States.

In 1947, the AFSC and Friends Service of Britain together received the Nobel Peace Prize for their "silent help from the nameless to the nameless."

AFSC supports the rights of immigrants, farmworkers, and refugees. It advocates on behalf of people who are homeless. It has programs on Indian reservations, in rural areas, in crowded cities, in prisons, and along the Mexico-U.S. border.

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The AFSC believes that people can speak for themselves. We believe people can change the world. Our job is to share skills, staff, and resources, and help communities get organized. Once we get involved, we tend to stay: 45 years with farm workers in the Central Valley, 50 years in the California prison system, 50 years with the American Indian community of the Bay Area and Western Nevada, 17 years with homeless people in the Bay Area, 30 years working for Middle East peace with Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

To contact AFSC call: (415) 565-0201
American Friends Service Committee
65 Ninth St. San Francisco, CA 94103

Santa Monica Tries to Outlaw Feeding the Poor

Editor's Note: Robert Myers is the former City Attorney of Santa Monica until he was forced out of his job for refusing orders to write an ordinance banning charitable feeding programs.

Commentary by Robert M. Myers

"Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor."
— Proverbs 22:9

As the kick-off policy initiative of her reelection campaign, Santa Monica City Councilmember Pam O'Connor wants to make criminals out of private citizens who feed the hungry in our community. O'Connor took this action in response to complaints from the Bayside District Corporation. This has been a familiar election-year theme for more than a decade, as Santa Monica leaders seek to placate those with much by depriving those with little of human dignity through a variety of punitive measures.

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." *— Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

The fruit of O'Connor's political pandering is an ordinance to be considered by the Santa Monica City Council. Voters concerned about civil rights laws, including rent control, should not even consider voting for politicians like O'Connor who don't have the backbone to defend the powerless. This law attempts to criminalize those who answer their personal religious, political, or moral call to feed the hungry.

SHARE THE WEALTH
God wants us
to be our brother's keeper.
To feed the hungry,
to clothe the naked,
to shelter the homeless,
to instruct the ignorant,
at a personal sacrifice,
is what God wants us to do.
What we give to the poor
for Christ's sake
is what we carry with us
when we die.
— Peter Maurin, The Catholic Worker

Contrary to the City's proffered justifications, this ordinance is not about concern for the quality of food served to homeless people, since the feeding programs provide safe and sanitary food which receives better reviews than the food provided by some City-funded programs.

It is not about the need for park space for other uses, since the feeding programs operate at times and places when there is ample room for everyone. It is not about "outsiders" coming to Santa Monica to serve the poor, since around the world "outsiders" are commended for their hunger relief efforts. It is not about preserving the City's social service system, since it is already inadequate to meet the needs of the City's homeless population; and private efforts support rather than undermine efforts to aid the poor.

"If one of your kinsman in any community is in need in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand to him in his need. Instead, you shall open your hand to him and freely lend him enough to meet his need. When you give to him, give freely and not with ill will; for the Lord, your God, will bless you for this in all your works and undertakings. The needy will never be lacking in the land; that is why I command you to open your hand to your poor and needy kinsman in your country."
— Deuteronomy, 15:7-11

Make no mistake about it. This ordinance aims to drive homeless people out of Santa Monica. Since 1991, the City has pursued a four-part strategy to run homeless people out of town. First, the City articulates the principle that only "professional" social service agencies should help the homeless. Second, it limits the number of social service agencies — and, correspondingly, the number of homeless people served — through the City's funding process. Third, it repeatedly attempts to curtail private efforts to help the homeless. Fourth, it unleashes punitive law enforcement measures against homeless people remaining in public spaces.



St. Benedict the Black (1526-1589) Icon by Robert Lentz, Bridge Building Images.

St. Benedict, a Franciscan, became famous for his care of the sick and the hungry.

The men, women, and children providing food to the unfortunate of our community are good and decent people. The City Council should reconsider making their charitable works of mercy a crime in Santa Monica.

"People experiencing homelessness are subject to basic violations of their civil rights through the unconstitutional application of laws, arbitrary police practices and discriminatory public regulations. Local governments, police departments, and business improvement districts, from our largest cities to our most rural communities, are diverting precious public resources and funding to penalize people for being homeless." *— Illegal to be Homeless: The Criminalization of the Homeless in the United States*

These efforts are part of a larger battle in our society between rich and poor. People with houses, businesses, and ample resources do not want homeless people in our community. Although the Bayside District Corporation has no problem with businesses that sell sweatshop-made products on the Third Street Promenade, it doesn't want homeless people tarnishing the shopping experience of its upscale clientele.

The City of Santa Monica is one of the wealthiest communities in Southern California and some of our residents find it uncomfortable to be reminded that the presence of hungry people is the consequence of economic and tax policies which enhance the incomes of the prosperous at the expense of the poor. Indeed, the State budget is consistently balanced by slashing health and welfare expenditures and sparing the wealthy from tax increases.

"The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is astonishing in an affluent society that anyone would be upset with citizens who volunteer to feed the hungry. Currently, 13.8 percent of Californians live in poverty and 4.1 percent of all households in the state do not have enough food to avoid hunger. Nationwide, more than 36 million people, including 14 million children, experience hunger. Private citizens responding to this overwhelming need should be commended, not prosecuted.

"Then the King will say to those on the right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me. Then these righteous ones will reply, `Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' And the King will tell them, I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!" *— Matthew 25:34-40*

The human right to adequate food is recognized in several instruments under international law. In 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt first articulated the human right of "freedom from want," including the right to food. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognize the* right to food as a basic human right. Government efforts to outlaw food relief unmistakably contravene international law.

"The right to food is the right to have regular, permanent and unobstructed access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free from anxiety." *— United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*

Santa Monica clearly does not have the authority to legislate in contravention of these well-established religious and human rights principles. The men, women, and children providing food to the unfortunate of our community are good and decent people. The City Council should reconsider making their charitable works of mercy a crime in Santa Monica.

"One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that an unjust law is no law at all." *— Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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The Largest Gated Community in the Country

The HOPE proposal is part of a larger plan to make San Francisco a gated community for the rich by driving out low-income renters.

by Carol Harvey

"Some of our opponents are pretty smart — smart enough to figure out that if you change who lives here, you change who votes here, thus you can change the politics." — Chris Daly, S.F. Supervisor

Calvin Welch, an affordable housing expert from the San Francisco Information Clearinghouse, wrote in May 2001, "San Francisco is a profoundly immigrant City with wave after wave of economic, ethnic, racial, cultural, political and sexual immigrants washing over each successive wave, building the most magical, integrated and cosmopolitan population on the North American continent... That's the San Francisco dream."

That dream began eroding when a high-rise boom changed the economy of San Francisco in the 1970s. Blue-collar union jobs in shipping, warehousing, and manufacturing were replaced by "new-collar" clerical, business support, and retailing jobs, "moving low-income people of color out of San Francisco to make space" for corporate offices. The first wave of gentrification in the 1980s, then a second wave during the 1990s dot-com boom, roared in like tsunamis, leaving higher and higher rents in their wakes.

"The cumulative effect of these forces has been to make the stock of existing rental housing in San Francisco ground zero for attack after attack," Welch wrote. "Desperation grips a wide section of the middle class, once content as tenants, to transform their current unstable living situation and seek out the supposed security of home ownership no matter what the social cost."

The latest desperate round in this battle of property owners against renters and the poor is the deceptively named HOPE proposal, championed by conservative S.F. Supervisor Tony Hall on the November ballot. HOPE allows a new category of apparently tenant-initiated condo conversions, removes the 200-unit-per-year limit, and eliminates restrictions on building size.

Currently, in a building with more than six units, landlords can't covert to condos. Tenants are protected by rent control and have relatively secure housing. HOPE would remove those restrictions and put all tenants at risk of condo conversion evictions, unprotected by rent control, with landlords selling off units one by one. Landlords can get 25 percent of the tenants to sign a paper saying, "I want to buy my unit." Once signed, the tenant can't rescind it. Landlords can easily collect signatures, pay tenants to sign, and include themselves if they live in the building. If you move out, your signature still counts.

San Francisco's super rich paid the Committee on Jobs to fund twin ballot initiatives to accomplish their ends. Using mayoral contenders Gavin Newsom and Tony Hall to front the Care Not Cash and HOPE proposals, they play on the two deepest fears of voters: "Will I lose my home? Will I end up on the street?"

Newsom, the voice of Care Not Cash, "guarantees" phantom services for the lost souls holding cups outside Mollie Stone's, an upscale supermarket in Pacific Height.

Tony Hall, the mouthpiece of HOPE, promises a "Home Ownership Program for Everyone." The super rich hope that fear and prejudice will influence voters so that San Francisco voting blocs will be changed and rearranged with populations more amenable to their interests.

The Strategy of the Super Rich

Sharon Stone, Danny Glover, Madeline Albright (who comes to visit her daughter and buy antiques), and others at stratospheric socioeconomic heights mingle and shop with the less rich and famous at Mollie Stone's. Donald and Doris Fisher of the Gap with their $2.1 billion, reside in a Pacific Heights highrise three blocks away. Close by, the family mansion of oil tycoon Gordon Getty, worth another $2.1 billion, overlooks the Bay from Pacific Avenue.

Other top ten San Francisco billionaires who shop at upscale stores are Robert Goldman of Levi-Strauss ($1.5 billion); Stephen and Riley Bechtel ($3.5 billion each); Susan Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway ($2.4 billion); Robert Niafy, movie theaters ($1.7 billion); George Roberts, leveraged buyouts ($1.4. billion).

Housing activists say the super rich have an agenda. And they have hired the Committee on Jobs to carry it out.

Some San Franciscans with world-class wealth have multinational corporate connections that stretch to New York and circle the globe. That these local big fish swim in national and international high seas becomes evident upon looking at the New York City Doe Fund Board, the group Gavin Newsom visited in the spring of 2002 to investigate their Ready, Willing, and Able program to get homeless people off the streets of New York.



Art by the S.F. Print Collective portrays the growing disparity between the obscenely rich and the very poor.

Newsom is the new stallion in the Getty-Burton stable. He is backed by their vast wealth and the considerable funding of the Committee on Jobs. He owns wineries and restaurants with Gordon Getty's son.

Ready, Willing, and Able (RWA) is the shelter plan Newsom will attempt to bring to San Francisco if he is elected mayor. Newsom filmed George MacDonald and the RWA program during his visit to NYC. Some of this footage was broadcast during a KRON Town Hall meeting, "Life on the Streets," which aired on March 27, 2002.

RWA is owned and run by millionaire entrepreneurs, George and Harriet MacDonald. George MacDonald connects with former NYC Mayor Rudolph Guiliani through the Manhattan Institute, in whose publications Giuliani's speeches are reprinted and essays published, and from which he is said to get all his ideas. In the summer of 1997, Sol Stern wrote in the New York *City Journal* of "George McDonald's... unexpected emergence as an ally of the Giuliani administration."

The Doe Fund is described by some homeless activists as one millionaire's (MacDonald's) collusion with another millionaire (Giuliani) to feed the voting public a program which appears to get the homeless off the street, but simply exploits their work or runs them out of town.

Anthony Williams, founder of New York's "Picture The Homeless," which organizes unsheltered people on the streets, reported that RWA pays these laborers $5.75 an hour for jobs working next to city employees earning $25 an hour. In the same way, Care Not Cash would reduce the wages of homeless San Francisco workfare street sweepers to $1.84 an hour while their DPW counterparts earn many times as much.

The Doe Fund's corporate and foundation sponsors include: Bloomberg News, Bloomingdale's, *Business Week*, Canon, Chase Manhattan, CIBC World Markets, Citigroup, Deutsche Bank, Fannie Mae, Forbes, Inc., Goldman Sachs, Kiplinger Foundation, Lehman Brothers, *Newsweek*, New York Junior League, *New York Times*, *People Magazine*, *Reader's Digest* Association, Saloman Smith Barney, Charles Schwab, *Time* Inc., Toyota, *U.S. News & World Report*, World Bank.

The Doe Fund website displays photos of the "wonderful benefactors" of their 11-member board. Global banking and financing representative, Mike Gantcher, Director of Investments Middle Market Group, CIBC World Markets, stands next to his blonde wife, Cynthia. They are identified under several photos that repeatedly omit the names of the smiling homeless partygoers standing beside them.

Other board members represent chemicals and biogenetic foods, Manhattan real estate, media conglomerates, venture capital and corporate finance, and global investment bankers like Citigroup.

Board member Leslie Hawke has Hollywood and Eastern European connections. Her son is actor Ethan Hawke, married to Uma Thurman. Her *People Magazine* story, "Mother On A Mission," recounts how she left the boredom of her life to join the Peace Corps in Bacau, Romania, after John F. Kennedy, Jr's plane crash. Using her connections on the Doe Fund Board, she set the mothers of gypsy beggar children to work in a Bacau Ready, Willing, and Able program. Perhaps her fellow board members from the corporate media made possible the publication of this puff piece.

Doe Fund board member Craig Lucas, of Zimmer-Lucas Partners, invests in biopharmaceutical and computer firms in Tustin, Costa Mesa, Sunnyvale, and Richmond, which develop high-density electronics, miniature cameras, and integrated circuits. And so we come full circle around the globe and back to California.

With so many high-powered business interests focused on homeless people, it raises speculation as to why they haven't been rescued from the streets long ago to affordable homes of their own.

The Broken Windows Theory

The conservative social policies of the super rich, represented by Newsom in San Francisco, are made clear by a look at the ideas of the Manhattan Institute, a right-wing think tank in New York City. Anthony Williams explains, "During the Dinkens Administration, the Manhattan Institute developed the Broken Windows theory, a way to deal with social ills which says, 'If you clean the dirt, the homeless will be swept out of sight, out of mind' — like shards of glass from a storefront window after a riot."

In his keynote address at the 1999 Livable Cities Conference in Washington, D.C., Giuliani said, "The Broken Windows theory, probably our first big success... is being applied in cities across the country." Indeed. Besides Bacau, Romania, the RWA program has expanded to Harlem, Jersey City, and Philadelphia. What a coup for Newsom if he can bring it to San Francisco!

Under Guiliani, the NYPD became a repressive force acting out the Manhattan Institute's Broken Windows agenda. After a thief attacked a woman named Nicole Barrett, and was falsely labeled homeless, Guiliani decided "to get those crazies off the street." Since 1999, police hostility has been directed at homeless people for quality of life crimes such as sleeping, loitering, urinating, obstructing benches.

Guiliani claims the homeless have disappeared from Manhattan. Activists say they are hiding in plain sight, running in terror from the police and possible incarceration in shelters and upstate prisons.

Gavin Newsom's Care Not Cash resembles the Manhattan Institute's Broken Windows theory. Homeless activists insist the cash-reduction plan is void of compassionate caring services. They say the real agenda is to sweep the homeless out of the city by making it too expensive to live here on $1.84 an hour, the workfare stipend reduction to be presented to voters in November.

Newsom's trip to The Big Apple to check out McDonald's Doe-funded Ready, Willing, and Able program exposed the Getty-Burton New York connections. Researching the right-wing Manhattan Institute and Giuiliani's approval of McDonald's attempts to use the homeless to "sweep" New York City clean, exposes the

See **The Largest Gated Community** *page 19*

University of California Seizes Shopping Carts



John and Nona Lacy camp out in Berkeley. They are longtime homeless activists and get hassled a lot by police.



Flower pushes her neat little cart through Berkeley.

Story and photos by Lydia Gans

Be a good, patriotic American, they're telling us; go out and shop. Acquire more stuff. We need new furniture, a DVD, a big-screen TV with a new sound system and a huge cabinet to store it all in. But now where do we put it all? Our homes begin to get so cluttered we have to get rid of some stuff. So we throw it in the trash, or we're environmentally aware and put it out on bulky waste pickup day; maybe someone else will take it home.

Now consider a homeless person with no home to store even the bare necessities of life. The elderly man's got a bad back and needs a pad to put on the cold, hard sidewalk under his sleeping bag. The young woman needs a set of clean clothes from the free clothing store at Trinity Church to go to a job interview in the morning. The mother needs a couple of extra warm jackets from the People's Park freebox to protect her children at night.

Since homeless people get hungry just like everyone else and free meals aren't always served at convenient times and locations, they might decide to stash away a sandwich or a piece of fruit for later. And there are things like medicine, combs and toothbrushes, basic toiletries that housed people keep in the bathroom. Or maybe — and this is so silly — the person feels a bit fragile and finds comfort in having a stuffed teddy bear to hold.

By now we're talking about more than can be carried around casually in a backpack, so we have a problem. With no place to put their stuff, the shopping cart appears. Be it some sort of basket on wheels or a regular market shopping cart, the person pushing one is immediately stigmatized. They don't have to be sparechanging, just sitting on a bench or lying in a park; with a shopping cart next to them they become people to be avoided, people who make us uncomfortable, people we wish were someplace else.

Besides the essentials that are needed from day to day, just about everybody, including homeless people, has other items they need to hold on to — important documents, photos, mementos of other times and places, a favorite book or special piece of jewelry. If they can't have a safe, protected shelter for themselves, they still need a little space for their things.

Some cities, including Berkeley, acknowledge this need. The City of Berkeley rents 99 lockers at Shattuck Self Storage and offers them free to qualified homeless people. It's not a perfect solution, and there are some problems with the storage system, but the City is working on it.

David Wee, a program supervisor in Berkeley's Mental Health Division, describes the locker program. "We offer it at no charge and we ask that the persons be actively involved with other homeless service providers and working toward permanent housing, or getting health care or getting mental health care, or obtaining financial service," Wee said. "So it's seen as a tool for people that are seriously working toward moving from being homeless to being housed."

The fact that the program is run by Mental Health is one of the problems. Some people have expressed feeling stigmatized by being associated with mental health just because they are homeless. Eve Ahmed, who runs the program, is aware of this and recently moved it to MASC, a multi-service center for homeless people. She says that she also avoids mention of Mental Health and tells people she's working for Health and Human Services.

Ahmed told me that she spends very little time in her office; she is mostly out doing outreach in People's Park or other areas where homeless people congregate, or at Shattuck Storage and its neighborhood where she makes herself available to resolve conflicts involving her clients.

In spite of her advocacy for the homeless, there are people who have been treated rudely by Shattuck Storage employees, and feel harassed if they go there too often. Others have difficulty moving their things up and down the stairs because they are not given access to an elevator.

Some homeless people who are not clients of Berkeley Mental Health, and are prepared to pay for their lockers, have also complained of poor treatment at Shattuck Storage. Flower, who has been homeless in Berkeley since last December, was quoted one price for storage over the phone, told a higher price when she got there, and ultimately, when she was prepared to pay with cash, was told they required a credit card. (Credit is a pervasive problem for homeless people, often one of the reasons why they are homeless.)

Storage spaces at least provide relief for one of the many problems homeless people face; however, there are not enough of them available to satisfy the need. After several confrontations around people's belongings in People's Park, there was a rumor that the University of California might pay for a dozen or so additional lockers at Shattuck Storage that would alleviate some of the pressure on the people who make People's Park their home. However, Glenda Rubin, UC Manager of Community Programs and Outreach, emphasized that at this point they are only exploring the possibility.

"We hope we'll be able to have a pilot project," she says. "I can't guarantee. We also have to talk to the community near the locker facility, because that's only fair."

Here comes the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) issue. Why should neighbors of a storage facility have the right to determine who can use that facility? Why is it "only fair" to question the presence of people who are poor and homeless, and who must roll their meager belongings around on carts? Why has it become acceptable to try to hide these people from view?



Gregory Daniel shows where the carts of the homeless are stashed at the City yard.

This brings us to the need for shopping carts. Even people with storage lockers need daily, or nightly, access to the basic necessities. Yet no government official or agency has shown the slightest compassion or good will in dealing with this. Shopping carts with people's belongings are banned from streets and parks, and are confiscated or ticketed if left unattended for a moment. The system is depriving people not only of comfort and dignity, but even of the right to have a few possessions.

It's not clear whether the ban on carts in People's Park and the streets around it is a city ordinance or a UC rule; but either way, it is very selectively enforced.

Furthermore, when people rail against shopping carts, they're not just talking about carts taken illegally from supermarkets, but any wheeled conveyance that identifies a homeless person. It can be one of those collapsible, personal shopping carts like Flower uses, or the carefully arranged and organized, almost classy-looking serving cart that Nona and John Lacy keep their essential belongings on.

What about a baby carriage? The stigma seems to attach to what is in it and who it accompanies. The rules also ban items like camping gear, mattresses and large items from People's Park. Clearly, the underlying motivation is to keep homeless people out of sight.

Recently, there have been several mass removals of carts and a lot of harassment of individuals who have their belongings with them in People's Park. Michael Diehl, an organizer for BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency), has encountered a number of cases of individuals who received tickets or had their carts seized by UC or by Berkeley police. When people leave their carts, bedding or other possessions unattended while they go to breakfast, or even to the bathroom, they are in danger of having them confiscated.

In August, in anticipation of students returning to the UC campus, there was a big push to get the carts out of People's Park. Warnings were issued. Not for the first time, Diehl organized a sleep-in on the streets around the Park as a protest. He explained that it was done "as a preventive action, to make a statement." The protest "bought some time," he said, but on August 22, the police hauled off a large number of carts to the City Corporation yard.

At the City yard, the carts are now stashed in a disorderly mess in a corner out in the open. Owners can retrieve them only if they are accompanied by a police officer or someone from Mental Health.

As of September 12, only four people had come to get their belongings. There was a sign posted in People's Park with a phone number for people to call about retrieving their carts. (I called that number and left a message several times but never got a response.)

One man in the Park whose tent, sleeping bag and personal items in his cart were confiscated, angrily described his experience: "So I went down there; they said wait 30 minutes, these people gonna come and escort you to get your cart. I stormed out. I come back, these two people... escorted me into the yard to go find my stuff. There's carts, there's all kinds of dirty shit; everything that they've ever wanted to throw away from Berkeley is there, out in the corner, outside just sitting there. Half of my shit is sprawled out mixed in with everybody else's debris. What is storage, when you stick it outside in a corner?"

See **UC Seizes Shopping Carts** *page 17*

Richmond Couple Charge Mistreatment at Shelter

by Terry Messman

The price of admission to an emergency shelter should not be the loss of human dignity and the basic rights that everyone else takes for granted, yet that is what a married couple say happened to them during their recent stay at the Bay Area Rescue Mission in Richmond.

When Byron and Sandra Cheadle walked through the doors of the Bay Area Rescue Mission last June, they found that they were forced to leave behind their rights to free speech, freedom of worship and free association. The married couple charge that they were even forced to cast aside their wedding vows and warned against "fraternizing" or even talking with one another during their 60-day stay at the shelter in Richmond.

The Bay Area Rescue Mission destroyed the dignity of shelter residents, treating them as a captive population to be managed rather than as adults with rights, Byron Cheadle said in an interview.

Susan Prather, a longtime homeless advocate in Richmond and Contra Costa County, said, "I've never referred anyone to the Rescue Mission. I don't like the way people are treated there."

"This was a nightmare that I can never, ever forget," said Byron Cheadle, as he recounted how he was mistreated by shelter personnel who repeatedly warned him not to sit next to his wife during meals, and not to talk to her during their entire 60-day stay at the shelter.

Byron and Sandra Cheadle repeatedly showed several shelter employees their marriage license showing they had been married for nine years, along with photo identification, Social Security cards, and birth certificates. Still, the Cheadles were forbidden to "fraternize" at any time or even sit together during the daily worship services at the shelter's chapel.

As Byron and Sandra Cheadle lay out proof of their marriage status during a recent interview, their faces still register shock and dismay at the way their marriage was dismissed and dishonored by workers at the Bay Area Rescue Mission.

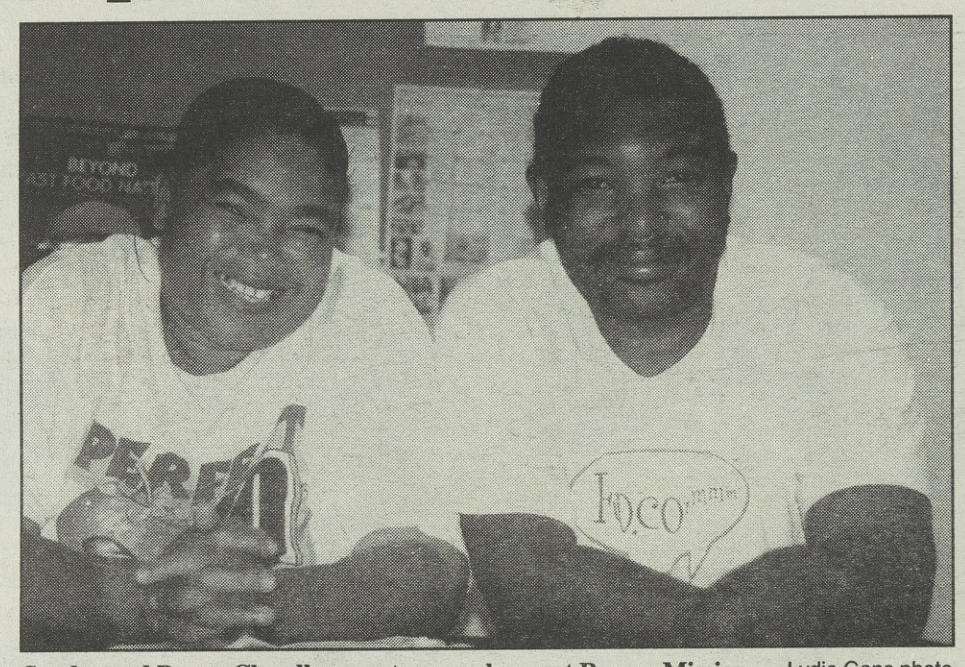
The written guidelines of the Bay Area Rescue Mission lay out strict policies against fraternization: "Women are not allowed to carry on a conversation with men that are staying at the Mission. **No fraternization.**" [Bold-faced in original.]

The policy of segregation by gender is strictly enforced. If a man or woman staying at the shelter talks to anyone of the opposite sex, he or she can be kicked out onto the streets. "Some of the women who have been to prison say it's worse than being in prison," said Sandra Cheadle.

However, said the Cheadles, they were told when they entered the shelter that the rule against fraternization did not apply to married couples. When the couple checked into the Rescue Mission on June 5, 2002, they were told that another couple was already occupying the room set aside for married couples. On their first day at the shelter, they showed their marriage licenses and other identification to shelter staff, and were told they would be next in line for the married room.

Not only was that promise broken, but throughout their stay, they were warned and reprimanded again and again every time they tried to talk with one another or sit together in church. They were repeatedly refused permission to eat meals together. For 60 days, the couple could not eat breakfast, lunch or dinner together, talk together, or sit together.

An iron gate around the women's side of the shelter separates it from the men's side. Byron said he couldn't even talk to his wife standing on the other side of the iron barrier.



Sandra and Byron Cheadle report many abuses at Rescue Mission. Lydia Gans photo

Sandra Cheadle said, "I asked the staff, 'How would you feel if you was living here and you couldn't talk to your husband or eat with him?' They just didn't respect my marriage. I got really, really fed up. They call themselves a mission, but they don't respect marriage."

The Cheadles were homeless and desperate enough to get off the streets of Richmond that they sought shelter at the Bay Area Rescue Mission even though they had heard of its stern rules. Once they entered the program, they were dismayed at the conditions they encountered, but their only way out was back into homelessness, so they endured their loss of freedom as best they could.

MANDATORY RELIGIOUS SERVICES

One of the costs of being sheltered at the Bay Area Rescue Mission is being forced to attend mandatory religious services before both breakfast and dinner, seven days a week. Women sit in the back of the on-site chapel, men sit in front. Segregation by gender is the rule in the chapel, as everywhere else in the shelter complex.

Byron said many of the residents disliked being forced to worship, and having their faith dictated to them, in order to receive food or a shelter bed. The entrance form of the Bay Area Rescue Mission declares: "The shelter provides a safe, clean and Christ centered environment to people who are facing a crisis situation." Not all shelter residents are Christians, but all are forced to attend the worship services.

Byron said, "A man who was Jewish said he didn't want to go to the Christian services. They said they would kick him out. They treated him like a piece of shit because he was Jewish. When he protested going to chapel, they disciplined him. So he ended up going to services. He didn't have a choice; he needed meals and a place to take a shower, so he had to."

Susan Prather said of the Rescue Mission's compulsory worship: "I don't think hungry people should ever be forced to sit through a mandatory religious service before they're fed and offered food and comfort. Because I think the first thing we need to do is make people warm, bring them inside, give them something to eat, and then ask what we can do for them."

The zero tolerance shown towards all forms of "fraternization," the strict gender segregation, and the disrespect shown towards clients who object to mandatory religion, are joined with another form of intolerance based on sexual orientation. The official guidelines of the Rescue Mission declare: "During your stay you should have a good attitude with Staff and other guests. Use of drugs, alcohol, bad language, obscene literature, fighting, stealing, weapons, homosexual/lesbian activity is not permitted. Violators will be asked to leave."

A Bay Area shelter has condemned gay and lesbian behavior in its official written policies in an unapologetic manner, even going so far as to equate it with stealing and weapons possession, and has made sexual orientation a grounds for expulsion.

Byron Cheadle said the atmosphere of coercion begins early in the morning. Immediately after breakfast, the men must leave the shelter property until 7 p.m. that night. This is another marked difference from society at large, where people have the right to stay in their homes, and the freedom to choose when to leave. It creates a childlike atmosphere of subservience, or as some shelter residents describe it, a cattle-herd mentality where people lose the ability to live independently and so become institutionalized.

Prather called it the mission mentality. People are trained to leave at 7 a.m. and be blindly obedient in everything they do, and then they carry that mission mentality with them in life. "Now we've had generations staying in shelters and missions and that's how they treat themselves," Prather said. "We have to be out by 7 a.m. We have to wander the streets all day."

The Cheadles said the food quality for shelter residents was substandard, and sometimes terrible. But Byron said there was a two-tier approach to food quality in which some residents were more equal than others. The regular homeless people received poor-quality food, while the so-called "programmers" who have made a long-term commitment to the religious goals of the mission received better food.

Prather explained this approach, saying, "My experience has been that it's a pyramid system. The people from the streets, the homeless people, the people who are so desperate, are treated one way and served one kind of food. And then the people who buy into the program, including all the religious stuff, they get treated another way and get better food."

Conditions in the bathrooms on the men's side were deplorable, Byron said, with water on the floor, sinks that didn't work, a broken window, and cold showers. Prather said cold showers are a long-standing complaint at the Rescue Mission. "One of the most frequent things I've heard is that there's not enough hot water to go around," she said. "What could be better when you're down and out and have nothing than a warm shower? And how much can that cost?"

After the Cheadles had been staying in the mission about a month, Sandra had a severe asthma attack in the middle of the night on July 9. She began gasping for breath and went outside for fresh air. A man warned Byron his wife was outside gasping for air, so he ran to bring her asthma medication in a pump. Byron went inside the shelter to dial 911 but the phone didn't work. No shelter staff was on duty, so Byron finally went inside the chapel and found a security guard. They called the ambulance, which took Sandra to Doctor's Hospital in Richmond, where the doctor said her condition was life-threatening and she had made it to the hospital just in time.

Byron said he asked the shelter director why no one was working on the night shift on the women's side. "I told the director, Carey Kachurka, it was very, very scary to not find help while my wife was sick. Some of the women have little children on respirators. What would happen if the children cannot find help?"

Bay Area Rescue Mission Director Carey Kachurka did not return repeated calls for her response to Byron and Sandra Cheadle's experiences.

Isla Vista Disbands Tent City

by Robert Norse

In Isla Vista, a community north of Santa Barbara that is home to the University of California at Santa Barbara, attorney Glen Mowrer is defending members of the former TeePee Village (also known as Camp Home Sweet Home) from sleeping and camping tickets after a long and eventful struggle for the rights of homeless people.

The emergency tent city was set up by activists in January 2002 in response to several tragic deaths in the homeless community. The camp survived through August, enduring police sweeps and garnering student and community support. It finally fell under legal pressure from the sheriff and the Union of Park Workers on the Isla Vista Parks Commission.

With strong public sympathy for their well-run encampment, the campers got the district to pass one of the most liberal laws on the books that fined sleepers only $20 and let them return after 12 hours; they narrowly missed legalizing sleeping completely. Then Mowrer got tickets under the new liberal law thrown out by showing that the Park District had been passing laws for the last few years without properly publishing them.

Complaints about the proximity of the camp to a nearby teen center sparked some controversy. A new law was rushed through which went into effect on September 1, 2002. It mandates fines of up to $1000 for violating the camping ordinance, requires a 24-hour stay-away following citations, and is a more serious misdemeanor crime. Park workers threatened to quit unless sleeping was included as a crime as well as camping.

Organizer Jenny Jett said union members complained they were being "stressed out" by homeless people and threatened to sue for disability benefits. "Yes, their job would be easier if no one was there," Jett said. "But what do they think this is? Their personal green empire?"

Activist Peter Marin said he felt the camp could have saved itself, or at least reconstituted the earlier, softer law by voluntarily dispersing. Jett said disabled camp members with wheelchairs and walkers needed to be near the public bathrooms in the park.

The new law states: "Unlawful to sleep between one-half hour after sunset and 6 a.m.... inside or outside of a vehicle on public property. Unlawful to camp in or on any public property. Refusal to leave or returning within 24 hours in violation of this ordinance — such a direction to leave is not a necessary warning."

Only Dorothy, a Chumash Indian, remains, says Nancy McCradie, "because it's her land."

Driving on a Long Road to Nowhere

In Santa Barbara, the hopes of homeless vehicle dwellers are betrayed by city officials.

by Robert Norse

"I went off," admitted activist Nancy McCradie of Santa Barbara's Homes on Wheels. McCradie stood up in the middle of a Santa Barbara City Council meeting on September 24 after hearing homeless vehicle dwellers denounced as thieves and rapists. "I called her a goddamned liar, then went outside followed by ten police officers and cried my eyes out."

At issue was a watered-down proposal for parking sites for Santa Barbara's 300-350 recreational vehicles, which serve as affordable housing for the poor, the disabled, and the otherwise homeless. After more than two years of meetings, the City Council's Ordinance Committee presented a wholly inadequate set of permitted locations in business parking lots, with added restrictions that allowed vehicle dwellers only a seven-hour window from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m.

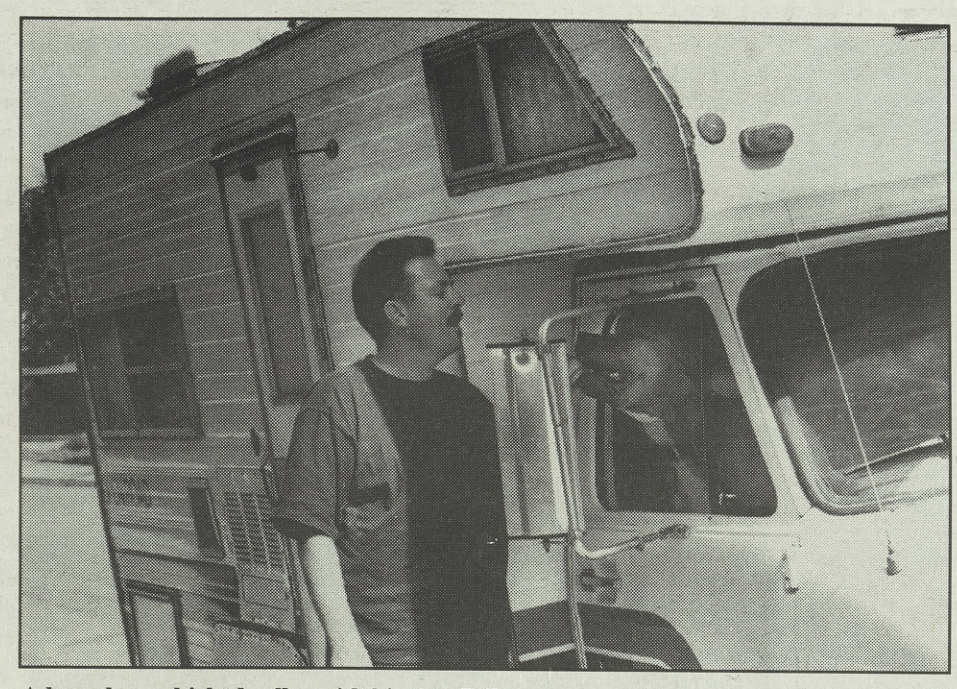
"Only one vehicle per business parking lot would be allowed," explained attorney Glen Mowrer, "ironically, only in the area between the freeway and the ocean where there had been most complaints of congestion."

"Business people," said McCradie, "didn't feel that parking lots downtown should be used because our vehicles are too big and might scare the tourists."

Meanwhile, the City has posted 90-minute parking signs down by the zoo, trying to eliminate the place where many homeless vehicle dwellers currently park. Many of them are disabled, however, which exempts them from the laws.

Two weeks earlier, Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum — also on the board of directors of Homes on Wheels — broke her word to McCradie and the unhoused community by supporting unprecedented restrictions on parking RVs throughout the city. The current 72-hour limit in unmetered areas is now due to be replaced with a two-hour parking limit throughout the city and a 2 a.m.-6 a.m. ban at night. Blum's assurance that these new enforcement provisions will only be passed when there are "adequate alternatives" for those who must live in their vehicles has not reassured activists.

Writer and activist Peter Marin said, "City staff has just recommended there be no parking on city lots because they want churches to take care of the poor. It's a denial of any responsibility on the part of liberal politicians. We see it in San Francisco, in Jerry Brown's Oakland, in Santa Cruz. I'm pissed off because we put in two years on this with minimum response on the part of the City Council. Nobody treats the poor as if there's any kind of urgency or crisis. They act like they're permanent vacationers who are despoiling the landscape by parking large RVs and spoiling the view for others."



A homeless vehicle dweller with his dog. RVs provide the only affordable housing for many poor residents of affluent cities where rents have risen. Lydia Gans photo

Marin said that the failure of liberal politicians to provide housing for the poorest citizens is an especially disturbing betrayal. "You've seen it in every city," Marin said. "Ostensibly liberal people have bad laws and pretend to cooperate in taking care of the poor — and do nothing. They create affordable housing which will be assigned to people who work for the local merchants. That's where they're spending their dollars: encouraging local merchants to pay low wages. But the truly poor on fixed incomes don't get housing and they don't get the right to park their vehicles anywhere unless private people come up with immense amounts of money to give them a place to park. No promise of a single cent has been expended on these projects."

Santa Barbara's housing activists faulted Mayor Blum for failing to find sites for a City-sponsored RV park for homeless vehicle dwellers and question why she hasn't allotted funds or property from the Redevelopment Agency's millions to deal with the crisis of homelessness.

"It has come to nothing so far," said Marin, speaking of the two-year lobbying effort to set up legal places for RVs in Santa Barbara. "We see the same series of congenial gestures that politicians have made for 2000 years."

Santa Barbara's sleeping ban law hasn't been enforced for some years. Its camping ban is essentially on hold due to persistent and creative legal opposition from attorney Glen Mowrer of the Committee for Social Justice. Mowrer, former head of the public defender's office and the Green Party candidate for state attorney general, has won several acquittals of homeless defendants charged with violating the camping ban, and has carried out a successful courtroom fight to establish the necessity defense in Santa Barbara. [See "Defender of the Homeless Wins Important Court Ruling." *Street Spirit*, February 2002.]

Mowrer recently was successful in expanding this defense to the parking ticket arena, which requires bail, involves a more cumbersome administrative process, and has "interests of justice" language, which is harder to hold judges to than the necessity defense. Though tickets are only $25, if not paid they can lead to the towing of a person's vehicle/home.

The Santa Barbara City Attorney recently spent nearly $1000 for an attorney, several police officers, and two city staff members in an attempt to prosecute two $25 tickets. The target of the tickets was a disabled woman in her 60s who was parking in a "No parking" zone especially placed to criminalize homeless people at night. Twice hospitalized for a heart attack and fainting spells two days before, she was first turned down by the administrative hearing officer on the theory that she should have gotten someone else to move her vehicle.

Commissioner De Caro heard nearly two hours of testimony documenting the disabled woman's medication, her treatment, and her attempts to get help, and threw out the case, suggesting she was single and too ill, and that her moving the vehicle would have endangered the public.

"Think about what it costs to fight this ticket and how willing the city is to go to the mat with something as trivial as this," said Mowrer.

The law includes an exemption allowing three vehicles to stay in the parking lots of willing nonprofits and churches; yet only five churches out of Santa Barbara's 250 churches with parking lots allow homeless people to park at night.

In response to Mayor Blum and the City Council's waffling on allowing sites for legal RV camping, McCradie's Homes on Wheels group distributed 1000 flyers. On every three-quarter-ton and larger vehicle within 10 miles of Santa Barbara, in Spanish and English, appeared the message: "Ordinance 10.44.200 would prohibit the parking of trailers, mobile homes, RVs, trucks, and buses on all city streets for periods longer than 2 hours in the daytime and in the nighttime between 2 am and 6 am. You will be subject to ticketing for violation, and seizure of your vehicle if not paid in a timely manner. Parking in front of your own home will be grounds for a ticket under this ordinance."

Perhaps in response to McCradie's distribution of flyers, and her passionate speaking and the impact of 23 other *speakers at City Council meetings, the council moved to delay the decision on* how few sites to allow for another week. A subsequent council session would later vote on the "RVers get out" enforcement provision.

"If they pass this law without alternative solutions for people," promised McCradie, "there will be creative protests involving the parking of RVs at the police department, the County building, and City Hall, as well as creative parading between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. along State Street and perhaps in residential areas. We're gonna have so much fun, it's not gonna be funny."

For more information, call Nancy McCradie of Homes on Wheels at (805) 886-4895 or e-mail: homesonwheels@aol.com. Call the Committee for Social Justice at (805) 560-6062.

Where to Eat When You're on the Street

St. Vincent De Paul Dining Room in Oakland

Review by Maureen Hartmann

St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room celebrated its 25th anniversary earlier this year. It serves noon dinners 365 days a year, except on the first Wednesday of every month, when the crew takes a break from cooking for maintenance. It serves from 10:30 a.m. until 12:45 p.m. at 675 23rd Street in Oakland.

When I first visited the light and airy dining room on September 9, I found that they served the gentlemen on one side of a wall and the women on the other side of the wall, with separate entrances. Within the ladies' area, there are a few special tables in an alcove reserved for families — women with children. From the big, clear window on one side of the women's dining room, the women and children eating there can look out into a peaceful garden with summer pink roses and chrysanthemums.

Served at the counter where guests picked up their food cafeteria-style, was spaghetti with tomato sauce cooked with pieces of pork and sugar — "Sloppy Joe style," according to the cook, only served over spaghetti instead of a bun.

A side dish was the zesty green beans. I was given a double portion, since I do not eat red meat on principle. Included also on my tray were a couple of yellow rolls and a piece of vanilla cake with a delicious white frosting on top. On the tables to which we carried our trays were two pitchers of ice-cold water for each table. For the taking near the serving area were assorted snacks, including Sara Lee bran muffins and Sara Lee apple cinnamon rolls.

After dinner on Monday, I interviewed a couple of my fellow guests. The first guest I interviewed wished to remain anonymous. She said her favorite dinner served here was "chicken and rice with red beans," and her favorite beverages were "orange juice and milk." She said she enjoyed the "service with a smile."

I asked her, "What does this meal mean to you?" She said, "It shows that there are people out there that care, that people take time out from their families, that come down here to make sure that others are fed."

Another guest said she had been coming to the dining room to eat "mostly every day" for "twelve years." Her favorite meal here was the beef stew.

The second time I visited the dining room as a guest, on September 13, it was another spaghetti day, but with big pieces of bacon in the tomato sauce. Available were small cartons of Berkeley Farms chocolate milk. The trays included a vegetable medley of peas, corn, green beans, and lima beans. There was a choice of white and wheat bread slices. Also on my tray were two oatmeal raisin cookies and a chocolate muffin with tiny, varicolored candies sprinkled on top. This time there were pitchers of milk, as well as water.

I talked after dinner to a woman with the nickname "Bunnie." She said she has been coming seven days a week for about a year now. Her favorite foods served there are the spaghetti and vegetable medley.

Bunnie had quite a stinging criticism of society. She said, "The reasons senior citizens and young people come here is because the rents have gone up so much. We cannot afford rent and fresh vegetables and fresh fruit for our kids and our sick selves and husbands. It is a shame how the landlords get away with murder here in Oakland."

Another guest named Ruth said she had been coming for about six months. Her favorite foods served at the dining room were "the chow mein they had the other day" (and) "fried rice.... It was really good." What the daily dinner means to her is "a place to go, where you are accepted. No one looks down on you."

I was impressed with the frequency of service and the kind atmosphere there, as well as the variety of nourishing and filling food.

Care Not Cash: Neither Compassionate, Nor a Solution

by Sister Bernie Galvin, Religious Witness with Homeless People

Widely proclaimed as a "compassionate solution," Proposition N, the Care Not Cash initiative, exploits the profound desire for solutions to homelessness in the heart of every San Franciscan. The leadership of Religious Witness with Homeless People has thoroughly studied Prop N and consulted with experts in the field. We have concluded that Prop N is neither compassionate nor a solution.

Prop N is based on the media-promoted stereotypical image of all homeless people as alcoholics or drug addicts who abuse taxpayers' money. The truth is only about one-third of the homeless population have substance abuse issues.

Like all stereotypes, this one appeals to our worst side, the side that judges, condemns and rejects our sisters and brothers who have no homes. Significantly, many of these individuals have already been begging the city for treatment but are forced by the inadequate number of treatment slots to wait for 6 to 12 months for help. Every day in our city, 1,000 to 1,400 people are still addicted because they are on a waiting list.

The city's neglect in producing truly affordable housing over the years, even in the years when the budget surplus exceeded $100 million, has resulted in our current crises in housing and homelessness. We believe it is morally wrong to force the burden of "fixing" these crises on the backs of the very poorest members of our community. Prop N would do precisely that.

Through slick ads on TV, radio, huge billboards and mass phone calls, Supervisor Gavin Newsom (Prop N's author) and the restaurant and hotel industry promote Prop N as an effective solution to homelessness. The truth is that Prop N will deduct all but $59 monthly from the very poorest members of our community and sink it into a program that offers no hope of alleviating San Francisco's homelessness crisis. Prop N is fraught with promises and loopholes but holds no guarantees for housing and services.



Religious Witness with Homeless People held a rally to oppose Care Not Cash proposal at San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza on September 29. Lydia Gans photo

Prop N does not guarantee housing. Given the current crisis in housing, it seems a stretch of the imagination that the city can quickly come up with "real" housing units for the 2,700 GA recipients.

A clue to the possible direction of the city in providing housing lies in Prop N's definition of "housing," which includes a cot or a two-inch mat on the floor of a crowded shelter. It is more likely that the city will simply focus on providing more of these shelter cots as the fastest and cheapest way of satisfying the requirements of Prop N for "housing."

Shelters are not a solution to homelessness. There is unanimous agreement among homeless people, advocates, service providers and other professionals that exiting homelessness requires stable housing with supportive services, addiction treatment, adequate mental and physical health care and jobs.

Prop N allows for diversion of cash-deducted "savings" from housing and services into many different areas, including the administration of the system. In fact, the majority of the estimated $6-9 million yearly "savings" could simply be used on administration and personnel and not on actual services. Again, Prop N promises but fails to ensure that expansion of housing or services will occur.

Prop N would provide vouchers for housing and meals. From the beginning, the complexities and costliness of the voucher system equal added frustration and significant suffering for the homeless recipient. Vouchers would mean increased administrative costs to business people, a potential avalanche of city forms, even possible liability issues. Thus it seems unlikely that a sufficient number of landlords and eating establishments would participate in the voucher system, thereby making it more difficult for homeless people to use them.

In addition, Prop N vouchers would not cover items like laundry soap, toothpaste, socks, aspirin, haircuts, telephone calls, etc. All such necessary items would have to be paid for by the homeless person from the meager GA cash grant of $59 a month.

The individuals who receive GA are already required to work for their money. They are WORKERS who clean buses and streetcars, remove trash from parks, and sweep streets. They work 8 hours a week (32 hours a month) and are "paid" $10.00 an hour in their $320 monthly GA stipend. It is unclear if recipients will be required to work these same hours for the $59 they would receive in cash. If so, they would only be "guaranteed" $1.84 per hour.

Religious Witness urges rejection of Prop N. Prop N is clearly not a solution to San Francisco's crisis in homelessness. Furthermore, experts warn that the implementation of Prop N would require far more of the city's money than the estimated $6-9 million withheld yearly from GA recipients, perhaps 3-4 times as much. Shall San Francisco embark upon a road which focuses a vast portion of our money, time, energy and trust in a policy based on a stereotype and with no guarantees?

In 1993, our elected officials set our city on just such a road. We remember all too well the great confidence with which San Francisco adopted a police approach (Matrix) as a major response to homelessness. After nine years and over 135,000 citations or arrests of poor and homeless people for so-called "quality of life" violations, homelessness is of an even greater magnitude than ever in this city. Multimillion dollars of taxpayers' money was squandered on that futile and inhumane approach.

We are convinced that Prop N would set us on just such a road once again. San Francisco voters should reject Prop N.

Contact: Religious Witness with Homeless People , P.O. Box 420486 San Francisco, CA 94142-0486. Phone: (415) 929-0781. E-mail: RelWitHome@aol.com

Gavin Newsom's False Claims of Medical Support

from page one

Cash, funding may be used to increase services, but nothing is mandated.

"The way to help the homeless is to create housing, and this proposal doesn't do that. This takes money away from people who are struggling enough as it is. It targets a marginalized group who are essentially powerless. That's politics at its worst, and that's very disappointing."

Dr. Elson grew up in Berkeley, went to medical school here, and trained at San Francisco General. A board-certified Family Practitioner, he volunteered as a physician in 1986 and, in 1990, became HAFCI Medical Clinic Director. He is an Associate Clinical Professor at UCSF in the Department of Family and Community Medicine, and president-elect of the Association of the Clinical Faculty.

As director of the HAFCI Medical Clinic, Dr. Elson provides direct medical care and supervises nurse practitioners and physician assistants in examining and treating anyone uninsured. The clinic has two programs specifically for homeless people, comprising 20-25 percent of the patients. Psychiatrist Adam Nelson, M.D, treats mentally ill homeless people. The clinic also does outreach three days a week.

"We treat a variety of people in all walks of life — students, artists, people laid off from the dotcom industry, homeless people, alcoholics," Elson explained. "We treat people who are mentally ill, and those who are not, people who are substance abusers and those who are not.

"We also see many marginally housed folks who I think will be most affected by Care Not Cash. Notwithstanding Gavin's claims, this proposal will do nothing to improve the situation of the homeless," Dr. Elson asserted.

"First, it doesn't deal with the underlying problem of homelessness: not enough housing. It doesn't increase the number of housing units. The solution to homelessness is to make sure that there is adequate affordable housing. No housing, and homelessness will continue. You can have mobile vans, social workers and fingerprinting programs. Until you get places for people to live, the problem will not be solved. Housing is the number one priority.

"Second, it provides no guaranteed increase in mental health or substance abuse services.

"Last, it takes money from people who are struggling enough as it is. Because it targets a marginalized group who are essentially powerless, it seems like politics at its worst."

Dr. Elson used the term "disingenuous" to describe Care Not Cash. He pointed out Newsom's appeal to San Francisco citizens' desperate need to have homelessness solved by promising them "the scourge of homelessness" will end. He expressed concern that Newsom is promising a whole community that "we are going to save people from dying on the streets" by the very simple maneuver of taking their money away, while giving no services in return.

Elson expressed concern that the Care Not Cash initiative provides no care, despite its title, and "that is why providers who work to take people out of homelessness do not support this proposal and why it will not work." He confirmed that many staff members at the HAFCI Medical Section and throughout the whole organization are concerned by the Care Not Cash proposal and are working against it.

"His website claims support from the medical community," Elson said, but "there is very little support among the people who provide care for the homeless. No organization working with homeless people is listed on the Care Not Cash website."

Dr. Elson said the ballot initiative's disingenuous claims are not lost on the hundreds of service providers working for low wages to help uninsured and homeless people. People who actually provide the care are not saying this is a good proposal. "Apart from Pablo Stewart, none of the HAFCI people I've talked to support this bill," Elson said.

Many will accept a deceptive argument if it offers a simple solution. Newsom promises he can easily fix the massive social problems of poverty and homelessness. "The Care Not Cash proposal makes homelessness simple," Elson said. "Yet it's a very difficult and complex issue. There is no one easy solution."

Elson said he thinks marginally housed people will be most affected. To prove they are housed, they must show receipts and documents.

"Gavin will take from the homeless a $300 stipend, all but $59 (of the General Assistance grant), to pay for housing and medical services promised by Care Not Cash. For a lot of marginally housed people staying at friends' houses or subletting, there is no paper trail, putting an unfair onus on them to prove they are housed. Since they cannot prove they are housed, they will have their $300 stipend taken away. So, their ability to do a little sublet under the table and pay a small amount of money for their living situation will be taken away, and they will become homeless. Fifty-nine dollars will do nothing. Care Not Cash may increase the number of homeless people."

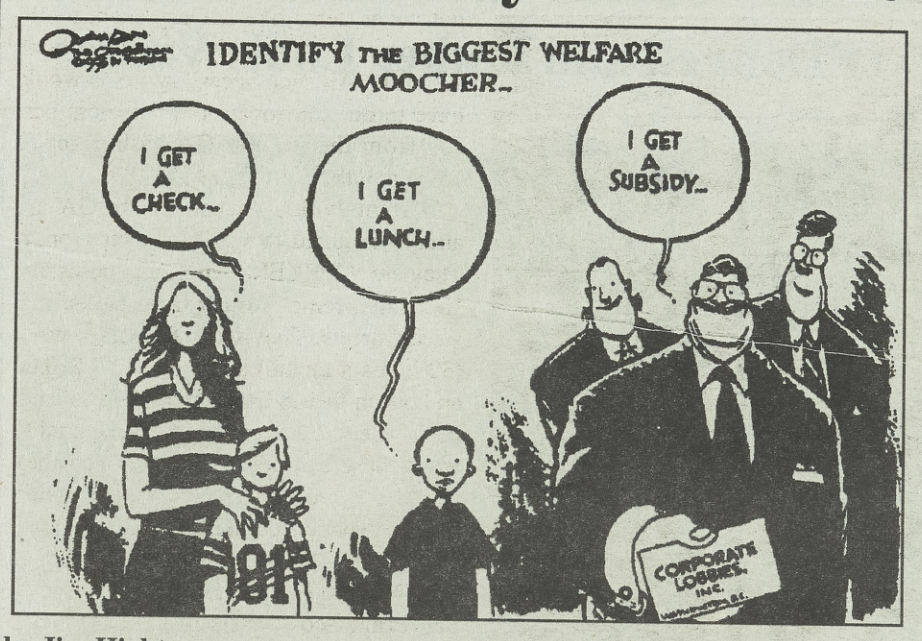
Dr. Elson stated that stereotyping homeless people as substance abusers "doesn't help. You need to approach people individually and see what's going on. If you consult a textbook on substance abuse, you will find a number of strategies to deal with the problem. One strategy you will not find is the removal of one's disposable income."

Asked what percentage of homeless people are addicted, Elson answered, "Plenty of homeless people aren't addicted to substances. Plenty of housed people are."

Homeless advocates have charged that the purpose of Newsom's initiative is to keep the homeless from coming to San Francisco to get a larger GA check, or to force the homeless out of the city by making it impossible to live here.

Elson responds, "I don't think people say, 'Where's the highest GA check I can get?' then go there. Homeless people won't leave here because there's no check. There are places with far better weather where it's cheaper to live. Yet people still stay here. This will not solve the homeless problem."

GE CEO's Ritzy Retirement



by Jim Hightower

At a time when hundreds of thousands of workers are either having their pensions taken away or finding that the plummeting value of their 401(K) won't even cover their basic retirement needs, it's awfully nice to see someone who's doing just fine, thank you.

He's Jack Welch, the now-retired CEO of General Electric. As CEO, Jack was big on cutting back on workers and moving GE's manufacturing jobs to China and other low-wage hellholes, even requiring GE suppliers to move their production out of the United States.

Wall Street hailed his stinginess, and Jack became a billionaire. But while he was becoming famous for firing GE workers and pinching corporate pennies, Ol' Jack was lavishing corporate dollars on himself. Even in this day of breathtaking CEO greed, Welch stands out. Compare your retirement benefits to his:

He gets an $80,000-a-month palatial apartment in New York City's Trump Tower, overlooking Central Park West, rent free. For life. There's more. GE pays for all of the apartment's fees, property taxes, and utilities, plus a chef, wait staff, and housekeeper, and his laundry, dry cleaning, toiletries, newspapers, magazines, and postage. Postage! He's a billionaire, but he can't spring for a stamp?

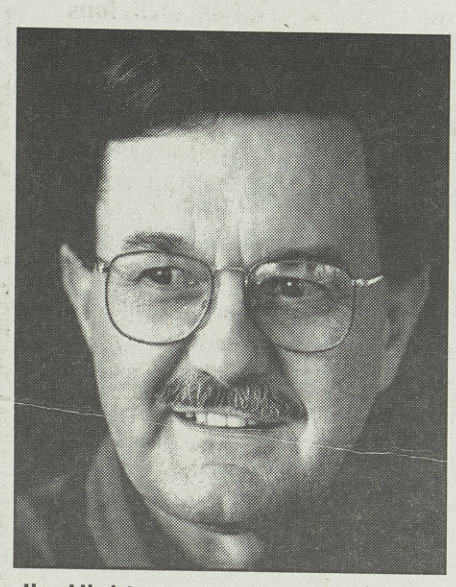
GE also pays Welch $86,000 a year for 30 days of consulting work, plus $17,000 for each additional day. He gets a corporate-paid life insurance policy and a $9-million-a-year pension, plus personal use of GE's jets, helicopters and limousines.

Don't forget entertainment. Jack gets free box seats at the Metropolitan Opera, and at Yankee and Red Sox games; V.I.P tickets to all Olympic events; prime seats at Wimbledon, U.S. Open, and French Open tennis matches; membership at four exclusive golf clubs, and free meals at the four-star Jean George restaurant.

And GE deducts all of this as a business expense — meaning you and I subsidize Jack's ritzy retirement.

The Corporate Culture of Kleptocracy

Just when you thought corporate greed could not get any more slimy, here comes Dennis Kozlowski rising out of the ooze.



Jim Hightower. Alan Pogue photo

by Jim Hightower

Only a decade ago, corporate greed was symbolized by the raid-and-loot assaults of junk bond king Michael Milken, who actually did time in the federal pokey for his finagling. Then, five years ago, the standard for corporate greed got uglier, embodied in the cut-throat job-cutting tactics of "Chainsaw Al" Dunlap.

Just a year ago, the ethical standard for corporate behavior fell even further, down to the shameless behavior of Ken Lay and the other Enron flimflammers who profiteered at the expense of workers, stockholders, and taxpayers. And just when you thought corporate greed could not get any more slimy, here comes Dennis Kozlowski rising out of the ooze.

He was the head heavy at Tyco International, the global conglomerate that's now in the financial ditch, thanks to the ineptness and the corporate culture of kleptocracy that were the hallmarks of Kozlowski & Company's managerial reign. There are rampaging street muggers with a greater grasp on ethics than this guy has. He'd steal the nickels off a dead man's eyes.

An internal report from Tyco now reveals that, in addition to all sorts of other chicanery, Kozlowski literally was looting his own company to gild his private nest. For example, with corporate money and without authorization, he bought himself a $30-million home in Boca Raton, Florida; he rented a New York City apartment for $1.3 million a year; he bought a $16.8-million apartment on Fifth Avenue (plus spending $3 million to renovate it and $11 million to furnish it); and he bought a $7-million Park Avenue apartment for his ex-wife.

It gets sleazier. Dennis seems to have a fondness for expensive knickknacks and tacky stuff, so he used Tyco funds to buy a $17,000 traveling toilet box, a $15,000 umbrella stand shaped like a poodle, a $6,300 sewing basket, and a $6,000 shower curtain.

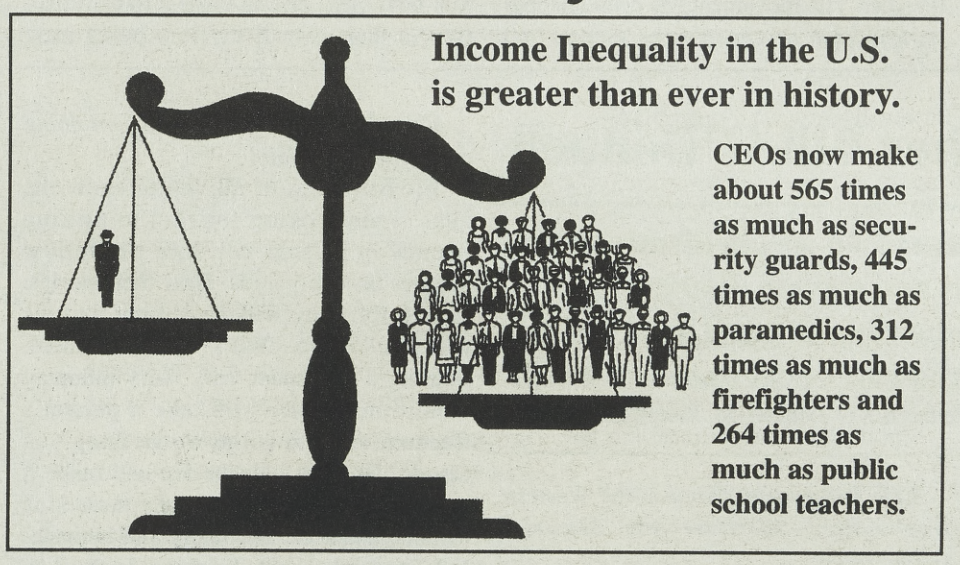
A $6,000 shower curtain? Surely it can't get greedier, slimier, and tackier than this — can it?

Jim Hightower is a speaker and author. To book Jim, visit www.jimhightower.com. To subscribe to the monthly *Hightower Lowdown, send $15, your name and address to: Lowdown, PO Box 20596, New York, NY 10011.*

CEO Greed Harms Economy and Workers' Wages

A parade of companies led by Enron have imploded from CEO greed. Some of America's worst CEOs make more in a year than the best CEOs of earlier generations made in their lifetimes.

by Holly Sklar



Income Inequality in the U.S. is greater than ever in history.

CEOs now make about 565 times as much as security guards, 445 times as much as paramedics, 312 times as much as firefighters and 264 times as much as public school teachers.

Labor Day came twice last year. A week after the parades and picnics, Americans had their real Labor Day on September 11. Americans poured out thanks to firefighters, police officers, paramedics and other workers who put themselves on the line to save others. Wall Street stockbrokers and secretaries, CEOs and minimum wage workers died — and survived — together.

The spirit of shared sacrifice was shattered in October as a parade of companies led by Enron began imploding from CEO greed. Some of America's worst CEOs make more in a year than the best CEOs of earlier generations made in their lifetimes.

CEOs pumped up stock with accounting steroids, hitting quarterly earnings home runs while doing serious damage to their companies, workers, shareholders and the economy.

Global Crossing Chairman Gary Winnick, who *Fortune* called "the emperor of greed," cashed in $735 million in stock over four years while leading the company to bankruptcy. The double-crossing Winnick bought a California estate worth $94 million after $30 million in renovations. Meanwhile, reports NBC, "Global Crossing workers lost their jobs, their severance pay, and promised medical benefits. Entire 401(k)s were decimated. With the exception of a select group of executives, Global Crossing employees could not unload their stock for five years."

Back in 1950, when *Business Week* began ranking CEO pay, the highest-paid executive was General Motors President Charles Wilson, who made $4.4 million in inflation-adjusted dollars. In 2001, the highest-paid CEO was Oracle's Lawrence Ellison at $706 million — nearly $2 million a day. Wilson would have had to work for 160 years to match Ellison's $706 million.

The average CEO of a major corporation made $11 million in 2001, including salary, bonus and other compensation such as exercised stock options — in a year when the economy tanked.

CEOs made about 565 times as much as security guards, 445 times as much as emergency medical technicians and paramedics, 442 times as much as secretaries, 312 times as much as firefighters and 271 times as much as police officers.

Back in 1960, CEOs made an average 38 times more than schoolteachers, according to *Business Week*. By 1990, CEOs made 63 times as much. In 2001, CEOs made 264 times as much as public school teachers.

The Census Bureau recently analyzed what people could expect to earn, on average (adjusted to 1999 dollars), during a hypothetical 40-year working life at full-time jobs. College graduates could expect $2.1 million and high school graduates $1.2 million. Workers with a professional degree, such as doctors and lawyers, could expect to earn $4.4 million during their working life — not even half what CEOs make in just a year.

While CEO pay spiraled out of control, worker pay was largely stagnant for decades. Average hourly earnings for production workers in 2001 were 9 percent lower than their 1973 peak, adjusting for inflation. If workers' wages had kept pace with productivity gains since 1979, average hourly earnings would have been $21.71 last year, not $14.33.

This year, workers need rescue. Congress should start by raising the minimum wage, which would help boost the stagnant pay of average workers as well.

It takes more than three jobs at the minimum wage of $5.15 an hour — $10,712 a year — to support a family. The real value of the minimum wage peaked in 1968 at $8.28 per hour (in 2002 dollars). Today's minimum wage workers earn 38 percent less.

Members of Congress made 9 times as much as minimum wage workers in 1968 and 14 times as much today. In 1997, when the minimum wage was last raised, to $5.15 an hour, members of Congress earned $133,600. Since then, they've increased their pay by $16,400 — much more than minimum wage workers earn in a year. Unless the Senate blocks it, Congressional pay will rise from $150,000 now to $155,000 in January 2003.

Congress should forgo another pay hike until the minimum wage has been raised enough to bring it back to the 9-to-1 ratio that prevailed in 1968. That would help Congress become more representative of low- and middle-income Americans and less representative of the swindling CEOs who pretended what was good for them was good for the country.

Holly Sklar is coauthor of *Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All Of Us* (www.raisethefloor.com). She can be reached at hsklar@aol.com and Box 1045, Boston, MA 02130. This article was used with permission of the author, and distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service.

The Prisoners of Peace

The *Street Spirit* Interview with Father Bill O'Donnell and Father Louis Vitale

Bay Area Priests Go to Prison for Peacemaking

Interviews by Eric Robertson

Father Bill O'Donnell grew up on a ranch in the Livermore Valley. Father Louis Vitale comes from a family of prosperous Los Angeles fish processors. Both are native sons. Both are Catholic priests. Both are in their seventies. And both will spend a good chunk of this next golden year behind bars in federal penitentiaries.

Father O'Donnell of St. Joseph the Worker Church in Berkeley and Father Vitale of St. Boniface Church in the Tenderloin, two of the Bay Area's leading human rights activists, have been sentenced to six and three months, respectively, for protesting the U.S. Army's role in the brutal suppression of poor people all over Latin America.

Technically, the charge is federal trespassing on U.S. property at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (until recently, named the School of the Americas). Located at Fort Benning Army base in Columbus, Georgia, the school changed its name in 2000 in an attempt to slough off a 56-year reputation as a terrorist training camp. In Latin America, it is widely known as "The School of Assassins."

Soldiers, police, and paramilitaries are sent to Fort Benning from all over Central and South America to learn psychological warfare, counterinsurgency, interrogation techniques, and infantry and *commando tactics. All classes are taught in Spanish. U.S. Congressional investigations* and a United Nations Truth Commission report have found an inordinate number of graduates responsible for many of the worst human rights atrocities in Latin America.

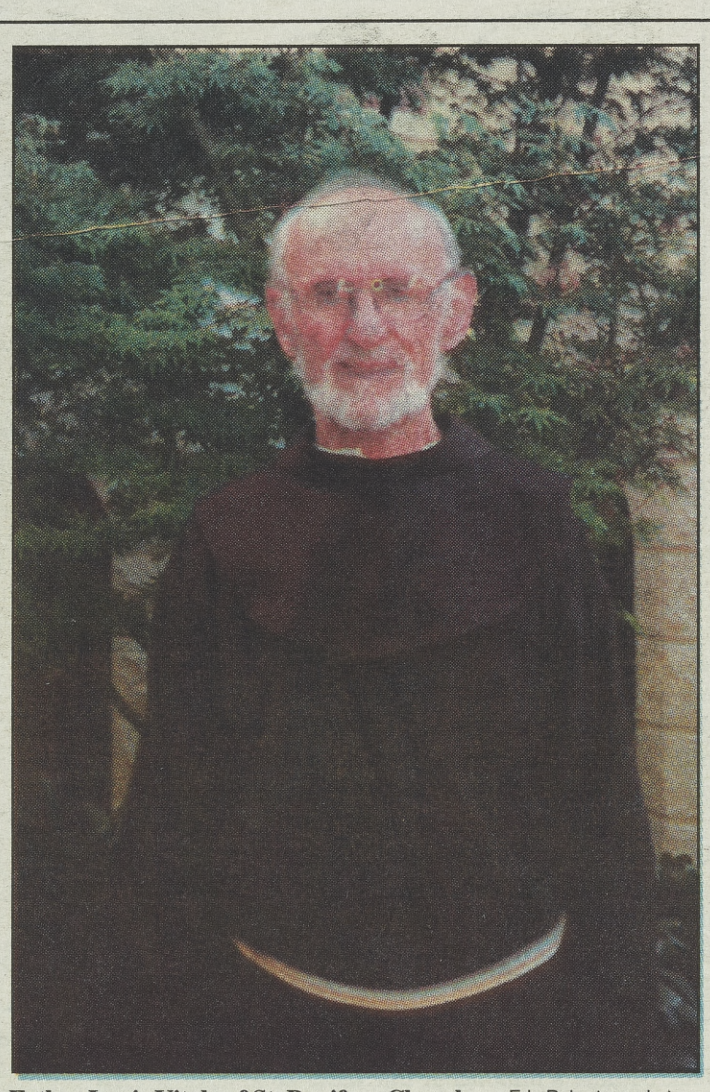
Organized protests of the school at Fort Benning were initiated in 1990 by a Catholic priest named Roy Bourgeois after six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her 15-year-old daughter were massacred at the Jesuit University in El Salvador. A U.S. Congressional Task Force found those responsible were trained at Fort Benning.

From the first 10-person protest organized by Father Bourgeois in 1990, the yearly on-site vigil grew to 10,000 people with ongoing protest activities throughout the year. The movement has been featured on television newsmagazines such as "60 Minutes" and newspapers throughout the country. Since protests began, 71 people have served a total of more than 41 years in prison for engaging in nonviolent resistance in a broad-based campaign to close the school. Even so, Congress has failed to shut the school down. A bill, 1810, is currently being considered to do just that.

These interviews took place as both priests were leaving their churches to go to federal prison. I found it fascinating that both these priests made a transformation in their own lives from being pro-military to being peacemakers. I have heard other priests talk about this, too — how the church was a backer of wars "in the name of God" before members of the clergy and congregations really started to look critically at this idea. In the first three centuries of the church's history, many Christians refused to serve in the military or obey the Emperor. The prison sentences that these priests will serve for protesting militarism in the year 2002 are part of a 2,000-year-old tradition of spiritually based peacemaking.



Father Bill O'Donnell of St. Joseph the Worker Church.



Father Louis Vitale of St. Boniface Church. Eric Robertson photos

Interview with Father Bill O'Donnell

The marshal said, "Clear the court!" so we obediently left the court and went in the streets and started dancing. Can you imagine? The joy of doing the right thing. The joy of the truth. Holding onto the truth. You can't beat that. It's worth going to prison to have that. — Father Bill O'Donnell, St. Joseph the Worker

Father Bill O'Donnell doesn't pull any punches when he speaks. It was what got him kicked out of the first three parishes he went to after seminary. He doesn't shy away from confrontation. He might say it's in his Catholic Irish roots.

With well over 200 arrests for acts of civil disobedience, he is without doubt one of the most dedicated activists in the Bay Area. His history in activism is a long one. He was regularly arrested with Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers. He has been arrested countless times for protesting nuclear weapons at Livermore Laboratory. He has committed civil disobedience in protest of U.S. intervention in Central America and has been arrested in housing takeovers organized by Religious Witness with Homeless People.

On September 10, 2002, Father Bill began his longest stay in prison yet — six months at the federal penitentiary at Atwater, CA, for his protest of the School of the Americas. I spoke with him at his St. Joseph the Worker Church in Berkeley just a few weeks before he went in.

Eric Robertson: *What is the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation?*

Father Bill O'Donnell: It used to be the School of the Americas. The Army recruited a SS Nazi expert in torture who was in charge of the Eastern European theatre. He was so good at torture techniques and how to disestablish communities and make people afraid that they hired him in 1946 and started the School of Americas, first based in Panama. When Panamanians got their independence in '85, they moved to Fort Benning in Georgia.

Eric: *Were you aware that you might get this kind of a sentence for protesting?*

Fr. Bill: Yes. The judge the year before said, "If I see you again, I'll give you six months." I thought that was so arrogant that I determined to cross that line again. The whole purpose of accepting this kind of punishment is to politically embarrass the Army, the Pentagon, and ultimately Congress, which is responsible for the School of Americas.

Eric: *What are you planning on doing when you are in jail?*

Fr. Bill: First of all, get to know the guys. I am looking forward to making friends in prison, not only the fellow inmates but the guards. Hear their stories. Hopefully, they will hear mine and we will share a life. That's what it is about. Sharing a life under very, very inhuman conditions. When you take a person's freedom away it is the worse thing you can do. How do you survive and make it work? How do you grow under those kind of circumstances, spiritually and humanely? That's the goal. Looking forward to the challenge.

Eric: *How old are you?*
Fr. Bill: 72.

Eric: *It seems like a lot of people your age would be looking forward to a more relaxed life.*

Fr. Bill: Well, I attribute that to burnout, to apathy, to giving up, to growing old. I don't know what retirement means. What do you retire to, a golf course? That's not life. That's playing at life. It's a nice game. It's not real life.

Eric: *But what keeps you motivated to stay involved in these fights?*

Fr. Bill: I want to stay alive. The struggle is very enlivening.

Eric: *Why did you chose to protest this school? Does it relate to the work you do here in Berkeley?*

Fr. Bill: Precisely. My faith dictates that any violence against the poor or the powerless or the helpless or the people that cannot fight back have priority for my attention. It starts with a human faith. I believe as humans we are all connected. When we violate one, we violate the other. Labor has a slogan — an injury to one is an injury to all — and I firmly believe that. My duty is to come to the aid of an injured person. It is how I heal my own injuries, giving comfort to people who are hurt socially, economically, psychologically, physically, it doesn't matter. So if we stand arm in arm, you know we may survive.

Eric: *Do you have personal evidence that this school injures people in South and Central America?*

Fr. Bill: Well the latest testimony was here in this church on August 3rd. Carlos Ramisio testified that he had been tortured by two generals who were graduates of the School of Americas. He was a victim of their torture. He survived and testified to that. He and two others just recently won a multimillion-dollar case in Florida against them.

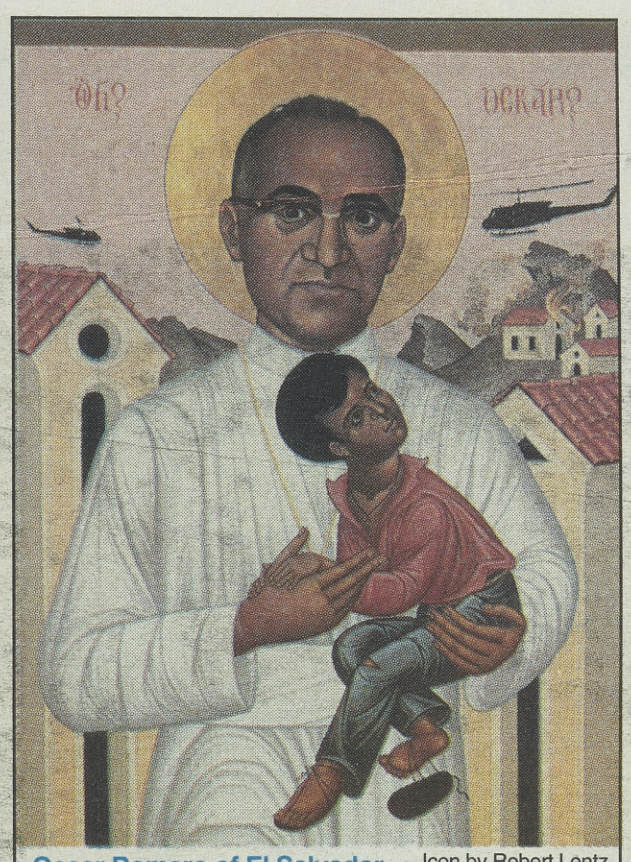
I belong to a small foundation. We fund health workers in Central America and other places and we talked to the peasants who have been victims of the soldiers. We talked to professors at UCA, the University of Central America. We talked to priests and nuns and ministers, union leaders. We visited the union leaders in prison who were victims of the graduates of School of Americas. So we

See **Interview with Father Bill** *page 18*



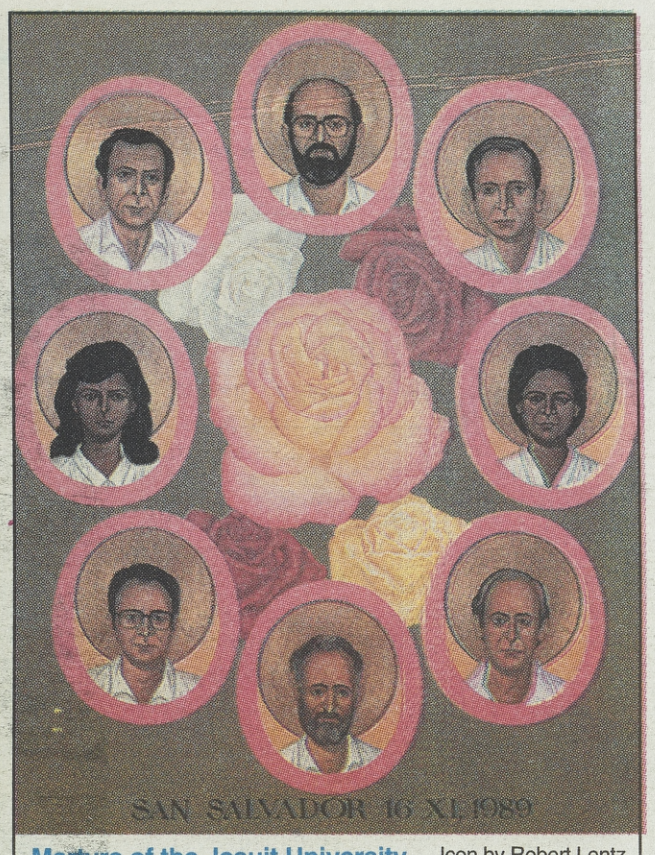
Mother of The Disappeared Icon by Robert Lentz

The Mothers of the Disappeared have had loved ones abducted by death squads. This icon shows Mary as one of the Mothers of the Disappeared. Her own son was abducted by a death squad and tortured to death. She carries his crown of thorns. The white handprint is the signature of El Salvador's death squads.



Oscar Romero of El Salvador Icon by Robert Lentz

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was assassinated as he celebrated Mass on March 24, 1980. Romero risked his own life to defend the poor and oppressed. He preached that society had to be restructured so that children would not die of malnutrition, poverty and disease.



Martyrs of the Jesuit University Icon by Robert Lentz

Government troops brutally murdered six priests and two women on Nov. 16, 1989 at the Central American University in San Salvador. Clockwise from top, the martyrs are Ignacio Martin-Baro, Amando Lopez, Elba Ramos, Ignacio Ellacuria, Segundo Montes, Juan Ramon Moreno, Celina Ramos, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez.

Interview with Father Louis Vitale

It is a war against the poor in favor of the rich, in favor of the greedy. It is part of the same thing that happens in this country where the odds are stacked in favor of the wealthy and laborers are short-changed and abused. — Father Louis Vitale

With his brown Franciscan habit and thin build, Father Louis Vitale reminds me of the archetypal hermit and wise man holding his lantern out in search of the way. This feeling is furthered when he shows me what he calls his "little hermitage" where he lives beneath St. Boniface Church in San Francisco. The eight-by-ten, sparsely furnished, concrete room is dark and cool, giving off a musky smell from damp walls adorned with a few religious icons.

As pastor of St. Boniface Church and former provincial master for all Franciscans in the Western United States, Father Louis clearly is not as much of a hermit as he might otherwise like to be. But on October 16 he may get his chance. That is when he begins his three-month prison sentence at the federal penitentiary at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada.

A long-time activist against nuclear weapons proliferation and militarism, Father Louis has been arrested for protesting underground nuclear explosions at the Nevada Test Site. He has committed civil disobedience in recent years with Religious Witness with Homeless People.

Quintessentially Southern Californian in the way he talks, his speech has a meandering quality and is peppered with "reallys" and "likes."

Eric Robertson: *What were you arrested for?*

Father Louis Vitale: Trespassing on federal property at Fort Benning.

Eric: *What made you decide to go there and protest at this time?*

Fr. Louis: Well, I've always been attracted to do that because I know people who have been involved there and because I have been in Central America a number of times visiting villages and communicating with people in refugee camps as well as churches, unions and civil rights workers that have been victims of torture.

I visited with Monsignor Romero before he was killed and went back there [to El Salvador] not very long after he was killed. I visited the Jesuits and the University of Central America before they [the Jesuits] were killed. And then, many people that have been victims of torture have come to this country and I have gotten to know some of them very, very well and know the stories of their torture.

So putting that together with the fact that the people that committed these atrocities, for the most part, were trained at the School of Americas — it is just an evil that should not exist in this country or anywhere for that matter. So I was glad to join in the protest.

Eric: *Did you plan on being arrested?*

Fr. Louis: I was a little uneasy because I was already on trial for Vandenberg [Air Force Base] and because I had the parish here to take care of and I didn't want to jeopardize myself too much. But as I got involved that day I just got very intensely caught up in it and something deep in my gut said I really need to get arrested.

Eric: *What is the connection between your work with the poor and your protest at the School of Americas?*

Fr. Louis: Well first of all, you know, this is the abuse of poor people. All of this is about economic power and the power of the dominating economic groups of the United States principally, but others as well. They are endorsing and establishing the economic classes in Latin America and providing the muscle for that by sending military support, but in particular, by training people at the School of Americas in what they call counterinsurgency methods, which are really methods of terrorism. Until they were called before Congress recently, they had a manual on torture.

They taught torture. They teach [students] how to spy and how to insert themselves among various community groups. We're talking about church groups, church catechists, church teachers, union members, various civic organizations that are all targets for this kind of training, this kind of activity. And all of that is to support an economic system that is favorable to us right now. It supports interests in Columbia that will take the oil rights out of villages. Death squads go in and threaten and kill people and chase people out of villages, and then they take over their oil.

So it is a war against the poor in favor of the rich, in favor of the greedy. That is clear. It is all part of the same thing that happens to people in this country where the odds are stacked in favor of the wealthy and laborers are short-changed and abused. So right off the bat, I think we need an entirely new economic policy, or what in Latin American they call a preferential option for the poor. We need to be really looking out for the poor.

In Catholic social teachings, the litmus test is how are the poor doing, you know, not how are the rich doing. What we see is the misery of the poor in Latin America, both in living in poverty, as well as being threatened, persecuted, tortured and even being put to death or disappeared.

And the same thing applies here. How are the poor doing here? We are spending money on military, but are we spending money on helping poor people with health care and education and, of course, food and housing? So it is all of a piece. It's the oppression of the poor by, kind of like, this global domination system which is really headquartered here in the United States and supported by our military resources, including and especially at Fort Benning.

Eric: *It's funny, because in the literature I have read, the school sells itself as promoting democracy in Latin America.*

Fr. Louis: I copied down a sign inside Fort Benning that says no marches, no demonstrations, no picketing, no political speeches, or any other activities are permitted at Fort Benning that may, in any way, be political or undermining of the government. And it goes on to prohibit things that most of us would consider the essence of democracy. You know, to be able to speak freely, to be able to demonstrate.

If people are coming to Fort Benning to learn about democracy and, as they drive in the gate, the first thing they see is a sign that outlaws what we consider an essential part of our democratic process, there is a tip-off right there. Then they learn that you enforce democracy by learning combat measures which have included torture. So how are you teaching democracy when you are really teaching control of people and suppression of their rights and even their physical freedom and lives? I mean right off the bat, it's not democracy.

Eric: *I don't know where I heard this, but I heard that at one point you were in the Air Force training to be a pilot?*

Fr. Louis: I was an intercept officer. I studied in navigator school and then I was an intercept officer. I set up the interception of the bombers or whatever the targets were and the firing system to shoot them down. I was kind of a back-seat jockey.

I was very gung ho about it at the time. I believed we were protecting the world for freedom and peace and democracy and all of that. I believed all of those things; but then we got in a kind of re-evaluation of things in light of the Vietnam War, in the time of the '60s. We really believed that there weren't going to be any more wars. You know, we believed that Hitler was evil and so was Hirohito for that matter; and that they had to be dealt with and that this was going to be the end of wars. So it was a big shock to people when we saw ourselves moving into a war where there were witnesses to the fact that it was not a war of freedom.

Eric: *Is that when you started to transform from being in the military to pacifism?*

Fr. Louis: Part of the transfer for me was while I was still in this very positive, so-called, military patriotic position in the '50s, when I entered the Franciscans, that coincided with the opening of the '60s. There was a lot going on in the church that was taking new looks at things. There was all this new ferment in society. Martin Luther King was marching in the streets. There was the anti-war movement, the farmworker movement and all these things I was exposed to coming out of seminary.

Eric: *Do you feel it is the duty of a religious person to commit civil disobedience?*

Fr. Louis: Well, I think it certainly is an obligation to stand up for justice. I've done a lot of fasting, some long fasting — 20, 30, 40 days fasting. I believe in a wide range of nonviolent activities, not just ones that break the law, but ways in which you really take the punishment on yourself. You accept the pain rather than inflict it on somebody else with the idea that, you know, maybe if you are right they will come to see it and become convinced. And if they are right you will see it. You know, I don't want to be fasting or going to jail for the wrong thing.

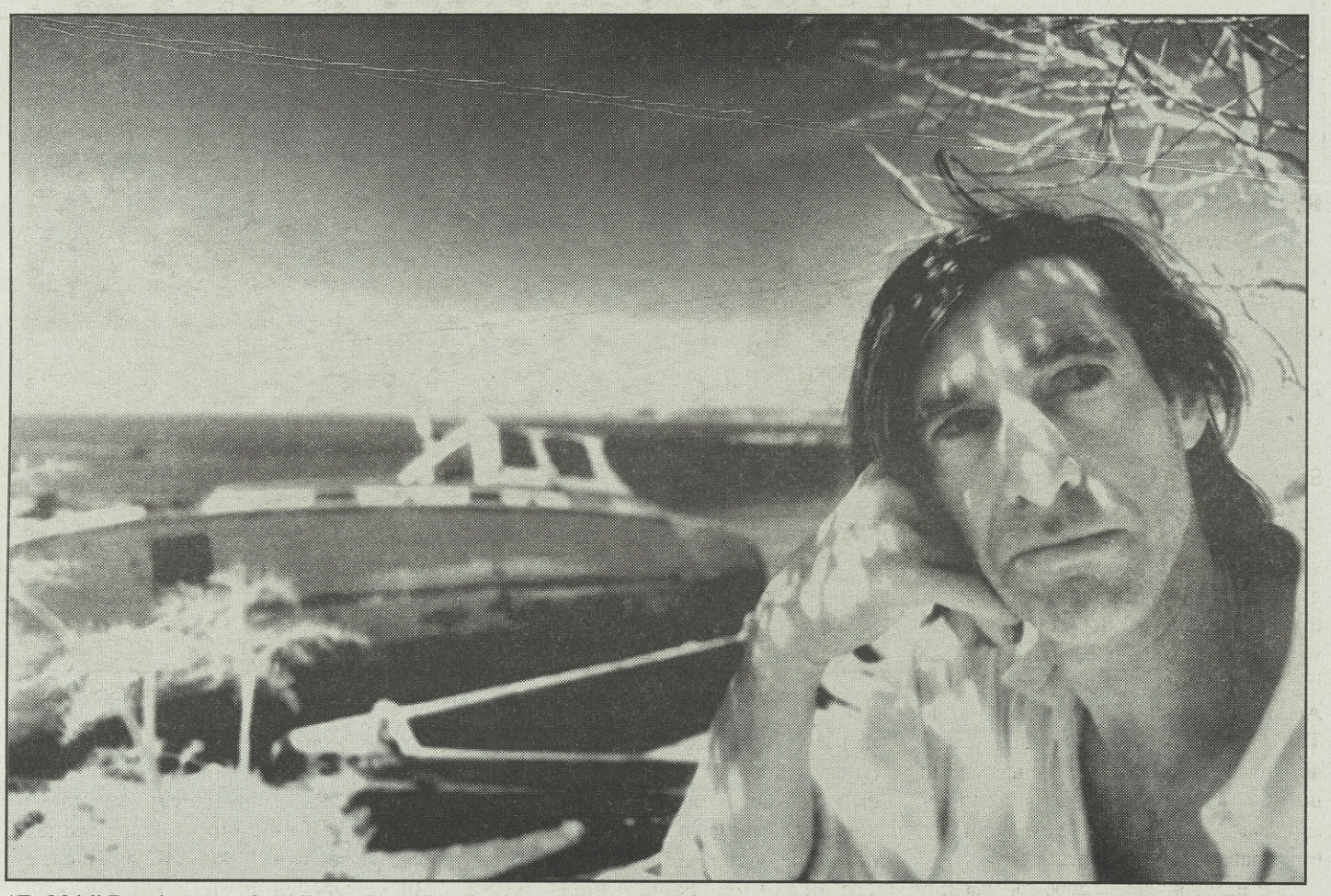
Eric: *So contemplation is an important part.*

Fr. Louis: Yes it is. Very much so.

"Bum's Paradise" Shows Human Face of the Homeless

Rabbit's sophisticated drawings, eloquence, and college education are a metaphor for the short distance between us and a life at the Albany landfill. Fate alone separates us from a life on the streets.

by Tomas McCabe



"Rabbit" Barringer at the Albany Landfill. The boat in the background drifted to shore and was used as a home until it sank.

"This landfill stands as a brooding monument to obsolescence. What could be a more appropriate refuge for America's unused people? Here, they can be hidden away from a society which regards them as a nuisance and an eyesore." — Robert "Rabbit" Barringer

On a peninsular landfill in the San Francisco Bay, a unique encampment of homeless men and women created a refuge. For nearly ten years they lived there, outside the "American Dream." In return, they created not only an alternative society but also a wealth of art. However, these accomplishments could not avert a devastating eviction by Albany police.

Recently there has been much debate about the Albany Landfill as it becomes part of the larger Eastshore State Park. Soccer moms, Sierra Clubbers, dog walkers, and wind surfers are all fighting for their piece of the pie. For the most part, these people have just recently started to visit or rarely, if ever, go to the landfill at all. Now these people are trying to claim it for their own and decide what is best done with the landfill.

The Albany Landfill began its life as a garbage dump, then became a destination for construction debris and dredge from the bay. It was closed around 1986 and, as wildlife and foliage began to return, it became a known campground for the homeless on their way to other destinations.

In the early 1990s, a few people began making the 70-acre Albany Landfill a more permanent living place by building dwellings out of scrap lumber, plastic, tents, and concrete salvaged from the landfill debris. As this camp flourished, local police began directing homeless men and women to it as a way to get them out of their neighborhoods.

For the homeless, it became a place where they could live without the daily harassment by police that they faced living on the streets. Instead of becoming solitary outcasts, the landfill residents came together and found a sense of stability. This stability, coupled with a life lived outside of conventional expectations, helped them create an alternative society, as well as explore their artistic abilities.

As one landfill resident, Robert "Rabbit" Barringer puts it, "This landfill stands as a brooding monument to obsolescence. What could be a more appropriate refuge for America's unused people? Here, they can be hidden away from a society which regards them as a nuisance and an eyesore."

Here the homeless had a home. After a day of recycling, panhandling, dumpster-diving, etc., they had a quiet place to go to read, write, paint, socialize or just think.

"Mad" Mark's nighttime endeavors lead to the creation of an enchanting fairy castle, a two-story structure complete with steel-reinforced cement floors, a pointed arch window, battlements, and a spiral stair, built completely from pieces of discarded concrete slabs. Mark built this for all Californians to enjoy as a monument to global resolve for the new millennium.

Jimbow the Hobow wrote moving poetry that cries out to a society that has tossed him aside. Piccasso Mike painted many mini-murals on bits of concrete.

A community of homeless people existed here for nearly 10 years, and the homeless that lived here were the only caretakers of this spit of land during this time. They welcomed all who appreciated the unique environment as much as they did — hikers, off-leash dog walkers and artists like SNIFF who made works of art from found objects.

Paula, a resident, penetrated to the heart of what it meant to live on the landfill: "The kindness that comes from nothing or someone who has next to nothing, but who will give till they can't give no more of their time or their food or their last 35 cents."

The first time I went down to the Albany Landfill, I spent two hours walking all over the small peninsula and was blown away by all the artwork I saw and the different styles of dwellings. There were so many paths; it was like a maze. And at the end of these crazy paths would be dwellings that would be completely hidden by bushes and shrubs.

That's when I first saw Robert "Rabbit" Barringer. I asked him if he was a resident, and he said, "Yeah. You want to come see my camp?" I said sure. This led to our discussing a documentary film I did in Guatemala. Rabbit said, "Well, you should do a documentary on this place." I said I'd do it if he would work on it with me and take an active role in it. I decided to buy Rabbit a video camera.

An amazing amount of creativity was found among the residents because, as Rabbit explains, they "are allowed to live free of public scorn and scrutiny and the daily harassment of police." Rabbit's sophisticated drawings, eloquence, and college education are a metaphor for the short distance between us and a life on the Albany Landfill. He stands as a bridge, showing each of us how fate alone separates us from a life on the streets.

As the eviction process dragged on, we spent many long days and nights at the landfill. We were fascinated by their resolve to live outside the system and their artistic abilities.

I asked Rabbit if he had written anything about the Landfill and he read a couple of things — a letter he had written to his folks but never sent about being homeless and living in the Landfill, and a story he had written for *Street Spirit* about his desire to live outdoors. They were brilliant and added immensely to the understanding of the film.

Rabbit's writing and the fact that we gave him a camera greatly influenced the final structure of the film. Once I was in the editing suite, I realized that Rabbit's voice needed to tell this story. Who could tell it with more insight than Rabbit?

For the next year and a half, I worked with Rabbit as he wrote the narration and I edited the film. This was incredibly difficult, because sometimes it would take me up to eight hours to find Rabbit. Since he had been evicted from the Landfill, his camps were transitory and I didn't know where he would be living one day to the next. After a while, I bought him a pager, but he still had to find a phone and call me, which could take three or four hours.

This collaboration, however frustrating it was at times, was worth it. It led to a piece that spoke for the homeless people themselves. Usually, the filmmaker asks the questions and shoots what is important for him or her. Here, we let the residents of the Landfill ask their own questions and tell us what they think is important.

The sense of community came to an end in 1999 as the City of Albany evicted the encampment to make way for development of the state park. What's going to become of the landfill is still up in the air. The last wild refuge for creative expression will no doubt be squashed. Let's just hope they don't try to completely erase the memory of what was.

This landfill could still stand as a brooding monument to obsolescence, but why not as a monument to free creative expression as well, and to the underappreciated homeless men and women that helped make it that way?

"Bums' Paradise"

Benefit screening

Sunday, October 27, 8:00 p.m.

Ashkenaz

1317 San Pablo Avenue at Gilman, Berkeley

Party to follow with live music from Marc Black / Funky Sex Gods

For more info: www.bumsparadise.com

"Bums' Paradise" is a film documentary that depicts the lives of the men and women who lived in the Albany Landfill community prior to their eviction. The film emphasizes their concepts of community as well as the amazing art that they created at the landfill.

Tomas McCabe, Andrei Rozen, and Robert "Rabbit" Barringer spent more then five months filming the homeless community at the Albany Landfill. What unfolds is a rich and complex story showing the full spectrum of human experience. We see segments on love, family, home, politics, community, art, insanity, and addiction.

Because we get drawn into the lives of the residents, their eviction directly affects the emotions of the viewer. Watching Dave, a landfill resident, worrying about what will happen to his puppies more than what will happen to him while being photographed and numbered by the police for his formal eviction, tears at the viewer's heart. Jean Paul reveals his shattering thoughts facing jail time: "Nobody wants to go to jail," he says. "But I'd rather go to jail for something I believe in, like my right to exist... somewhere."

The obvious distress of the residents and the hopeless red-tape quagmire witnessed in the Albany City Council Chambers are brutal to witness. We know the residents now — they're not just faceless panhandlers. "Bums' Paradise" is a poignant reminder of what we lose when we lose the human face of homelessness.

The Witness

A play by Martha Boesing and Anna Brown Griswold

Faithful Fools Street Ministry

Review by Ellen Danchik

"The Witness" is a play about a woman's journey through the hard streets of poverty and homelessness in search of compassion and enlightenment. The play was written and directed by Martha Boesing and performed by Anna Brown Griswold at the Faithful Fools Street Ministry in San Francisco's Tenderloin on September 28.

It is difficult to be reserved and objective about a play as inspiring and overwhelming as "The Witness," and I hereby give up any pretense of that. Simply put, this play is one of those rare occasions when art serves the higher purpose of making the world a better place for all of us. And isn't that what art is supposed to do? To uplift us? To make us realize that we are connected to all living beings and the universe itself by some invisible thread, and that there is a divine power in that, a truth that truly could save us all?

We may sometimes hope for that from art, but rarely, if ever, have I experienced it in my lifetime. So I was quite unsuspecting when I attended this one-woman drama. I knew I was to see a play about homelessness, but I had no idea that the audience would accompany a young woman on her journey to enlightenment.

The journey of the protagonist, Tracy, could be any one of our own journeys through life. Tracy begins as a good-hearted young woman who cares about others and even works in a soup kitchen. But on her path she finds out that those feelings are not enough, that she must truly experience others in a deeper way before she can feel peace within herself.

Her story is interwoven with the ten Ox-herding pictures of the Zen Buddhist teachings. In the teachings, the bull is the principle of life and truth and enlightenment and the ten pictures represent steps in awakening to one's true nature.

In "The Witness," Tracy encounters homeless people; and her own inner conflict with these issues lead her to a street retreat with the "Faithful Fools," an actual group in San Francisco that takes non-homeless people into the experience of life in the Tenderloin, one day at a time. The idea of the "Faithful Fools" is that one of the ways change will come is when we all change inside by understanding our commonality, our unity with all beings.



Anna Brown Griswold shines in her performance of *The Witness*. Meredith Stout photo

It reminds me of the sentiment in "The Rock Will Wear Away," a song by Meg Christian and Holly Near, about fighting oppression one person at a time: "Can we be like drops of water falling on the stone, splashing, breaking, dispersing in air, weaker than the stone by far, but be aware that, as time goes by, the rock will wear away."

Tracy's street experience is profound. She not only "sees how others live," but goes beyond that when she meets Suzanne, a woman on the streets, and connects with her and learns from her on a deeply human level. Tracy also comes to understand that loneliness can be felt by anyone (including herself), whether or not they have a home, and that, likewise, a community can be created by neighbors with homes or among those without homes.

The "otherness" she felt in the beginning is completely broken down on a journey into human unity that correlates with the ten steps of the Ox-herding pictures.

By the end of this journey, we believe in her transformation as Tracy recites these verses from "The Gift" by Hafiz, a 14th century Sufi master: "*You ache with loneliness one night/ So much you weep/ and I say,/ here's a rope,/ tie it around me,/ I will be your companion/ for life.*"

We share in her gladness at this moment of compassion and unity, and we believe her because it gives us hope that we, too, can go to that place.

In the course of the play, Anna Brown Griswold, an accomplished actress, plays four different characters: The main character Tracy; Wendy, her southern aunt; George, her political friend; and a Faithful Fool. She seamlessly shifts from one character to another, always taking us with her. The most impressive acting (and also entirely improvisational), was performed when Tracy is almost in the final stage of her journey. She portrays her newfound empathy by approaching members of the audience and mirrors what she is feeling from them

Griswold has taught art to homeless children and at-risk youth both here and in Nepal, and has co-created and acted in several ensembles and one-woman shows, including "The Vagina Monologues." She is especially excited about doing this play now, hoping to counteract the increasing negative sentiment against homeless people in San Francisco.

Martha Boesing, the writer and director, is herself a "Faithful Fool." She is a renowned playwright and director, best known as the founder and director of At the Foot of the Mountain, a women's theater, and most recently for her work as director of the traveling Jewish Theater. She has written and produced over 40 plays.

Boesing described the serendipity that gave birth to this play. "I got the idea of writing something about the street retreats and then I ran into Anna Brown Griswold, an old friend of mine who had become a theater actress. Then she went on a street retreat and we discussed how we ought to write a piece about a woman going on a street retreat. And I had for years been wanting to do a play about the ten Ox-herding pictures."

"Both Anna and I had been on the retreats and had notes of our own," Boesing explained. "Then we also read other retreat participants' journals and we read a lot in *Street Spirit*, so we did some research. Then we improvised. I would set up a scene and Anna would improvise and I would take notes and then write it up from the improvisations. Once we had a skeleton from the ten Ox-herding pictures, it really came quite easily."

One woman who sat next to me in the audience said after the play that she suddenly decided to begin giving breakfast to a homeless man who is often near her home. She said that she always puts milk out for the stray cats and that she felt guilty that she hadn't until now thought of giving the homeless man breakfast, too. But she said, "I won't feel guilty. I'll take action. Isn't that what tonight was all about?"

*Her sudden resolve is a beautiful testi*mony to the power of "The Witness" to inspire and transform. Thank you, Martha Boesing, Anna Brown Griswold, and the co-founders of the Faithful Fools, Rev. Kay Jorgensen and Sr. Carmen Barsody, and all of you who dare to take the journey.

The next performance of "The Witness" will be Saturday, October 12, at 7:30 p.m. at Open Secret Bookstore, 923 "C" St., San Rafael. For information, call (415) 474-0508.

UC School of Public Policy Seems to Deny Access to the Poor

by Kevin McFarren

"If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution," is widely attributed to Emma Goldman. Whether she said it or this saying is actually a paraphrase, it does make sense.

The University of California at Berkeley has seen its share of revolution. Mario Savio stood atop a police car in Sproul Plaza. His words still resonate: "There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part…"

That was in 1964. The Free Speech Movement helped make Berkeley a magnet for young people. Five years later, the revolution took a drastic turn. The University of California decided to "pave paradise and put up a parking lot," to quote Joni Mitchell. The activists moved into action. Then-Governor Ronald Reagan called in the National Guard, with helicopters dropping tear gas on Telegraph Avenue. James Rector died, shot by police.

For years, the UC has opposed students and community members who were fighting for justice. Who knows how much the UC spent on police action to crack down on campus protests against apartheid in South Africa? They flew in UC police from around the state to break heads. And guess what? Apartheid is no more.



Well-dressed waitpersons offered a catered meal at the grand opening of the Goldman School of Public Policy in Berkeley. Lydia Gans photo

The University has long opposed the folks who call Peoples' Park their home. My hero, Osha Neumann, won a lawsuit against the University for taking and destroying property from homeless people.

So now, the UC has built a beautiful new addition to the Goldman School of Public Policy at Hearst and Leroy. What irony! I only hope that Emma is not related.

The grand opening in late September was quite a show. Perfectly dressed waitpersons offered a variety of food, including more raw tuna than I ever want to see again. The free bar had so many boutique beers, people were not waiting to be served, just to decide.

What I recognized, though, was that the building was designed to keep people away. It is built like a fortress. At first, I thought it was my paranoia. After all, I have been homeless. I tend to look for places with easy access. This is not one.

As I was an invitee, I decided to ask some questions. They couldn't exactly throw me out. Amazing what you can get away with.

I had a simple question: Was the building designed to deter homeless people from gaining access? I asked several people and got several answers.

Kate works for the School of Public Policy. Her answer was that the School discourages the homeless from being on site but that should not have played a part in the planning of the building.

Nina at Architectural Resource Group, who designed the building, laughed and said she could not answer that question.

Nancy at BBI Construction said the plans were for a "secure" structure.

Michael is the most forthcoming. He is an independent architect. He said there was no question about it. That building needed to be positioned in a private setting. This is the School of Public Policy —yet they hide it.

Challenging the Deceptions of Corporate Media

Interview with Norman Solomon

by Hans Bennett

Norman Solomon is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, and a longtime journalist exposing media deception. As well as writing for big-name, anti-corporate publications such as *Extra!* (published by the media activist organization FAIR) and *Z Magazine*, he was recently featured in the *Los Angeles Times* and has also appeared on the shows of corporate media giants like CNN and National Public Radio. As one of the preeminent alternative journalists today, his work is an extremely valuable tool for all of us who want to understand how we have been lied to by the powerful. His most recent book is *Habits of Highly Deceptive Media,* published by Common Courage Press.

Hans Bennett: *A few years ago, you wrote an essay in **Extra! Magazine** defending the basic tenets of journalist Gary Webb's "Dark Alliance" series in the **San Jose Mercury News** exposing CIA complicity in Los Angeles' crack-cocaine epidemic. You focused in particular on the attempts by the **New York Times**, **Washington Post**, and the **Los Angeles Times** to discredit Webb's story. Looking back, how many people do you think read and believed Webb's story? How effective was the corporate media's attempt to censor the story?*

Norman Solomon: I think quite a few people did read the series. I remember picking up the *San Jose Mercury News* the day the first part of it came out and it was splashed right on the front page. I thought, "This is not your garden-variety corporate journalism in the daily paper." I would guess that because of its prominence in the *Mercury News* and being circulated from there, certainly several hundred thousand people would have read at least one of the parts of the series.

In retrospect, the media systems that exist in this country were much more successful trashing Gary Webb's series than in "censoring" it per se. The extent to which major media outlets devoted appreciable resources and emphasis to denouncing Webb's work was really extraordinary. I think something close to a major media consensus emerged about Gary Webb's series.

I wrote a column very soon after the series was published, in which I said it was a very important series, which seemed very solid. Soon after that, there was appreciable mainstream media coverage, which was not particularly negative. It was a mixture of media treatment; and then, of course, there started to be a lot of radio talk shows, especially those with many black listeners. But the boom really got lowered. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *LA Times* absolutely ended up really cutting the legs out from under that story.

Bennett: *Has there been anything in the media during the last couple of years that has talked about the series?*

Solomon: The particulars of Gary Webb's story are on the record. He has a book that came out a few years ago through Seven Stories Press. But the story has largely been left behind. In terms of mass media, I remember sending an e-mail to Gary Webb soon after the story broke. I wrote something like: "The bust of you is being prepared at the pantheon of Upton Sinclair, George Seldes, and Robert Parry." I was partly joking, but that is of course what happened. In any event, the conventional wisdom has been established that Webb got the story wrong.

I think the truth is much more that Gary Webb got the story right. Maybe some of the packaging by the editors at the *San Jose Mercury News* (headlines and so forth) was not as tight as it should have been. Webb pointed out that he was constrained by space. Even though it was a fairly large amount of space, he was forced by editors to reduce the length of the series in terms of the ground that he covered. This may have been a factor, but I think the fact that the CIA-backed Contras engaged in drug running is incontrovertible, and yet the news media on the whole decided that they didn't want to go there, with a few exceptions.

Bennett: *You've quoted the late **Washington Post** publisher Katharine Graham's 1988 statement to senior CIA officials proclaiming her desire to help the CIA hide "dangerous" facts from the U.S. public. Throughout their history, how has the CIA and the rest of the national security state worked to manipulate the media?*

Solomon: Agencies like the CIA have functioned on several different levels. There's the overt manipulation: putting out disinformation stories, including what is referred to as "blowback," where they plant stories in the foreign press, which then blows back into U.S. media.

Officially the CIA is not supposed to directly manipulate the news media. In his book *Inside the Company*, Phillip Agee talks about that going on several decades ago in Latin America. CIA fabrication of stories throughout the world still goes on.

I think there are so many other ways which not just the CIA, but the Pentagon and the State Department and White House, are able to truly manipulate the news. Part of it is background briefings, sometimes semi-off the record, which point reporters in directions. There are a lot of friendships between top government officials and publishers and reporters.

In my review of Katharine Graham's Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiography (the only negative one I've seen) that I did for *The Progressive*, I wrote about Robert Parry. He was a reporter at *Newsweek* and was told that a very tough and, as it turns out, accurate piece that he had prepared about the CIA role in Central America was put under extra scrutiny. There was some concern because Henry Kissinger was going to be Katharine Graham's houseguest that weekend, and subsequently the editors thought it should be toned down. In fact, Parry says, it was toned down before it went to print. That is just one example of self-censorship and institutionalized spinning that goes on inside media outlets.

The net effect is that these government agencies get a lot of what they desire out of the media. They don't get everything. They certainly can't spike all of the stories they're trying to prevent. All in all, it's part of an ongoing process that is very favorable to the powers that be in Washington, and for that matter, on Wall Street.

Bennett: *In last December's issue of **Z Magazine**, you documented extensive state censorship of information, even to the corporate media that has been, historically, pro-U.S. military. One such example that you write about is the censoring of civilian satellite pictures of the post-bombing carnage. While the U.S. media's coverage of the Vietnam War was certainly not truthful or anti-U.S. military, television news was known for showing some graphic and often heart-wrenching footage from the battlefield. In this regard, it was different from today. When did this shift in U.S. media coverage of U.S. wars begin happening? What do you think are the motives for this?*



"Children are not a target market." Mother and children at a protest of corporate influence over the Federal Communications Commission. Hans Bennett photo

If democracy is going to come into being in this country in a significant and far-reaching way, it needs to tear down the economic inequities that are making democracy in many respects impossible.

Solomon: I think the shift has been partly shaped by the political climate and the extent to which there is a strong anti-war movement functioning inside the United States. I was 13 when the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was passed in 1964, so I have a fairly good memory because I was pretty alert at the time of the media's coverage of the Vietnam War. It was really lousy for much of the war. As a matter of fact, during the first years of the war the media was terrible. They were suck-ups to the Pentagon and the White House and the State Department. The issues raised were largely tactical.

Early on, there was not an emphasis on the carnage in human terms; and I think you can make a strong argument that there was never a very effective baseline of U.S. media coverage of the war in Vietnam. Yes, there were some graphic photos, and certainly some of the coverage on television became grimmer and occasionally gruesome, and became not what the White House would have preferred. We're talking here the late '60s and early '70s, but the war really escalated savagely by 1965 and there was a media climate that had very little acceptance of dissent in the mid-1960s; and anti-war protesters and critics were often vilified when they weren't ignored.

Because of the anti-war movement and the horrific, cumulative realities of the war in Indo-China, there was a shift in media coverage during the course of the Vietnam War. But, it's hard to imagine that the coverage that we got in 1971 could have been the cold start kind of coverage. That's not the default position of the U.S. news media. I think in general when the flag goes up and the missiles start flying, the reflex of the mass media is to close ranks around the warmakers in Washington. There have been some real changes and I think certainly more government restrictions have been imposed upon U.S. media coverage in succession.

It was bad during the invasion of Panama in 1989. There were pools and it was very controlled. The Gulf War was even more controlled, having a pool system and so on. The coverage of the bombing of Afghanistan is even more controlled. There is very little that reporters ever seem to see or have access to in terms of the bombings that took place. They are always showing up (if at all) after the fact and have already written their stories on the basis of the stuff being spewed out of U.S. government PR offices.

So, I believe that while U.S. government restrictions and overt manipulations have been very important, there is also the key dynamic of self-censorship. The people with the power to make decisions in newsrooms across the United States overwhelmingly internalize the worldviews and outlooks of the people waging war at the Pentagon and their civilian superiors. With that sort of identification with the warmakers, the major media outlets and the journalists that serve them are very ill-positioned to engage in actual journalism. They're doing stenography for the powerful, and when it comes to times of war, those are very blood-drenched, powerful institutions and individuals.

I recently wrote a piece in the *LA Times* about the contrast between the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Iraq that occurred on July 31 and Aug. 1, 2002 (where the questions from senators were not even softball questions — they were beachball questions) and the SFRC during the Vietnam War under the chair of J. William Fulbright, with a key member being Wayne Morse, who is just a heroic figure. Morse was vilified in the media, not so much because he warned that the war strategies would not be "successful," but much more profoundly, he argued on moral terms. He wasn't against it because it wasn't winnable, but because it wasn't moral. That again set it even farther outside the perimeters of mainstream media wisdom.

You can see that now in the Congress where even the supposedly best members

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of Congress, like Senator Paul Wellstone, can't find the voice to denounce preparations for a horrific war against Iraq. Media punditry and reporting is so overwhelmingly based on tactical debates. "How do we" instead of "whether or not" to wage the war; how it could be done effectively, rather than whether we as a country have any ethical basis for slaughtering people with an attack on Iraq.

Bennett: *MIT linguistics professor, anarchist, and anti-Vietnam War organizer Noam Chomsky often cites a poll taken where 70 percent of the U.S. public thought that the Vietnam War was not a "mistake," but "fundamentally wrong and immoral." In light of the U.S. media and military propaganda, what do you attribute this to?*

Solomon: Over a period of years, a strong anti-war movement developed in the U.S. Although disparaged often in the mainstream media, that movement with its many facets, most of them very positive, had huge effects on general public consciousness. So despite the role of the fourth estate — to an extent functioning as a fourth branch of government during the Vietnam War — information flowed, first at a trickle and then gradually into a flood. It flowed from the grassroots.

Obviously there was no Internet then. Nobody had a computer during the 1960s unless they worked in some high-budget office somewhere. There were independent newspapers (what we called "underground" newspapers) and they were in literally hundreds of communities around the country. They had various outlets, such as Liberation News Service. They did this against great odds, and certainly with very little in advanced technology. I think the most advanced technology used at that time was the telex machine, which were very clunky and most of the underground newspapers didn't have them.

LNS would send out packets of news, and people would gather news in their own communities. The circulation of the underground newspapers went into the millions every week. There were a few independent radio stations at the time, like the stations owned by Pacifica or the few community outlets, and the underground papers, and magazines like *Ramparts*.

To me, as somebody who turned 18 in 1969, magazines like *The Progressive* and *Ramparts* were extremely important. I read my first anti-war articles in *The Progressive* and they happened to be written by people like Sen. Frank Church and Sen. George McGovern. I read *Ramparts* magazine, and its photos and articles about the war in Vietnam were very important to me, as they were to a lot of people.

We went to rallies and demonstrations, often with hundreds of thousands of people, and we learned from them. The effect was that we had a parallel society appear where, as information flowed, moral outrage grew and a critique developed. That critique made its way, albeit in diluted form, into mainstream media outlets, even into outlets like *Time* and *Newsweek*, the largest daily papers, and even onto television. Subsequently, the official line on the Vietnam War was challenged over a period of many years. There were contrary views of recent history which took root.

However, I don't have a particularly rosy view how the public now perceives the Vietnam War. You're going to find a lot of people that don't have a clear understanding of the horrendous brutality of U.S. policy towards Vietnam. Many really don't understand what was wrong with it, and that it directly correlated with what's wrong with U.S. society ongoing: the corporate power, the drive for profits, the lies from the government, the geopolitical efforts to dominate the planet, and the news media being dominated by Wall Street & Pennsylvania Avenue. All those factors made the Vietnam War possible. Many people have a quite astute understanding, but a lot of people absolutely do not. That's not surprising because even with the strength of the anti-war movement at its peak, the mainstream media and the propaganda structures still have enormous impact and reach.



Protesters at the World Economic Forum in New York in February 2002 were forced into blocked-off areas. Hans Bennett photo

In terms of corporate capitalism, Dr. King was a declared dissident and opponent. He did not believe in the accumulation of wealth and the continuation of poverty. He was denouncing what the news media in this country today holds as sacred.

Bennett: *This past July you appeared on CSPAN's "Washington Journal" news show. You've also appeared on CNN, NPR, MSNBC, and the FOX News Channel. When you've been on these mainstream news programs, do you feel that you were able to get your message out?*

Solomon: When I've appeared on the mainstream news outlets that you mentioned, they were almost always live broadcasts, which I always prefer. I felt that for those particular minutes, I was able to say pretty much what I wanted. I think that's good. At the same time I try to keep it in perspective. Just because there are cracks in the wall, doesn't mean that there isn't a wall. We should certainly utilize the cracks as much as possible, but still the wall exists and it acts as a constraint on wide-ranging debate and the free flow of information.

Any advertising executive knows that the essence of propaganda is repetition. It is good that there are some progressive voices on TV networks and other major media outlets, and we should strive to get more progressive voices onto more media outlets more often. But since the essence of propaganda is repetition, the occasional progressive voice in mainstream media doesn't fundamentally shift the media systems of the country away from serving corporate and militaristic power. I think that power continues to be maintained by and through institutions that are about maximizing profit rather than about democratic discourse.

Bennett: *Do you feel that some media outlets today are more open to having dissident guests than others?*

Solomon: I do. I think that not all media outlets are the same even though they're corporate-owned. We can go specifically and look at FOX News Channel, which is basically terrible, and it runs from the center to the far right. If you look at CNN, I think that it is also very corporate-driven, very deferential to the corporate government in power in this country. There's very little space for dissent if it's not right wing. MSNBC's news coverage in general stinks. At the same time there is more of an openness. I should say that it has the lowest ratings of these three networks. The Donahue show, which began in July on MSNBC, is really a good program and has more progressives appearing on that program than on all of the rest of cable television (meaning CNN, MSNBC, and FOX). It's an important experiment, and I hope that it not only survives, but also thrives.

There are, I think, some distinctions there. Not all daily newspapers are the same either, but frankly the difference is still slight. For instance, in the past I have been asked questions like: "Who do you think is better? Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, or Tom Brokaw?" My answer is: "What do you think is better? Camels, Salems, or Winstons?"

I think often we are encouraged (because the media terrain looks so bleak) to make distinctions that, while they may exist, are not really measures of very much difference. Another way to put it is that we've been acculturated to have such low expectations that we see at times differences that do exist as being much more significant than they truly are.

If people listen to "All Things Considered" and they think they're getting something from NPR news that is tough, independent, and wide-ranging journalism, they have been lulled into delusion. It's very hard to shake out of that delusion if all you're doing is tuning into "All Things Considered." If you have the good fortune to turn on the radio and listen to the "Democracy Now" program that Amy Goodman hosts, then you can have a basis for seeing other possibilities. A lot of why "popular culture" remains so popular is because people don't readily experience an option. You flip through the TV channels and all you see is the propaganda and the junk.

Another way to put it is that people can't choose from choices that aren't available to them. Whether I'm walking down the street in Philadelphia or San Francisco or anywhere else in this country, I don't have a choice to walk by a magazine rack and buy a paper that is owned by the people that work there, that isn't run for profit, and that challenges militarism instead of sucking up to it. There is no real choice. Some of the political rhetoric that is considered rational in the U.S. is so over the top. You can hear people say: "The fact that I can walk into a supermarket and choose all these different brands of different foods is a metaphor for democracy." That is the illusion of choice. That's not reality in the sense that we have a qualitative diversity. Rather there is a quantitative diversity.

Bennett: *What do you think are two of the biggest lies propagated by the U.S. media?*

Solomon: It's a tough question. It's hard to choose one to two, and we're talking about the grim, the damaging, the destructive aspects of public information flow, which is to say "disinformation flow." One of the very worst examples of propaganda in this country is that we don't notice it. That there is constancy, scenery that is set up. The scenery is in place and it becomes the wallpaper of our world to a large extent.

LIE ONE

My first, biggest lie would be whitewashing the history of the Vietnam War. Once the Vietnam War was over, I think the notion that it was an aberration was a very muddling and destructive illusion. This relates back to what we were talking about earlier, that it was bad because it was a mistake, because it didn't turn out the way its architects had hoped, because it wasn't "won." That ambiguous overlay, which is very damaging, persists today.

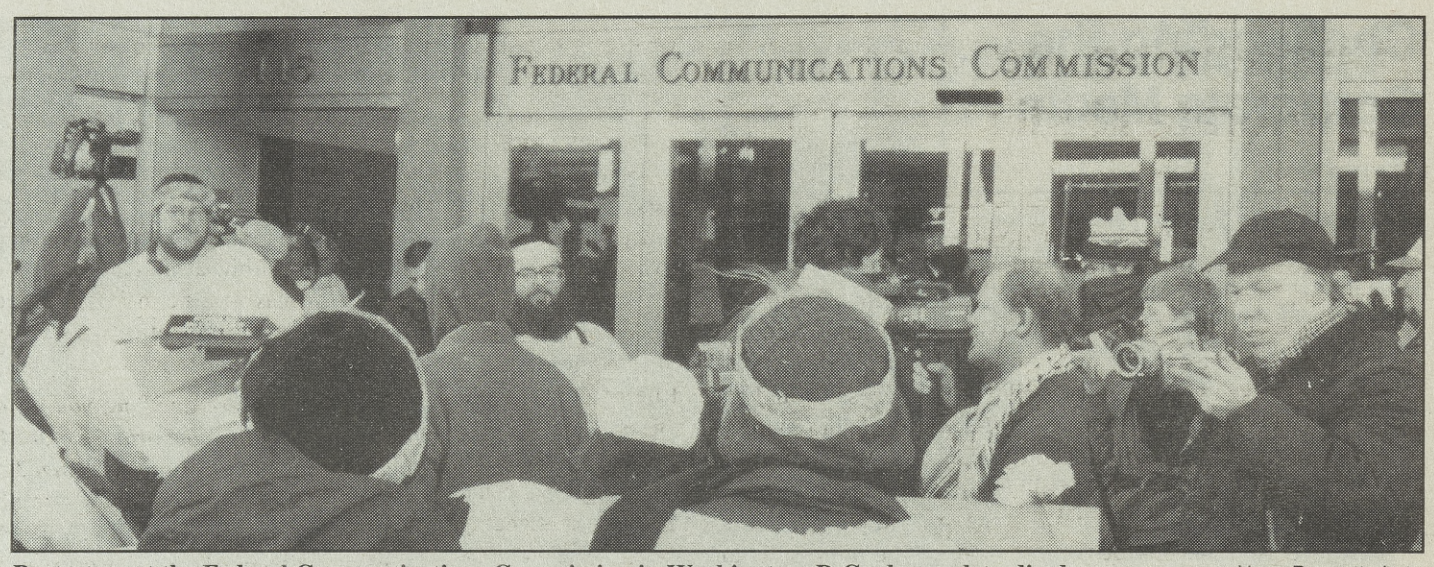
On Aug. 1, 2002, I was watching the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on PBS and there was an interview with Joseph Biden, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Paraphrasing, he said, "If we had hearings like this, which just concluded, early on in the Vietnam War, maybe we would have had better results." He didn't say what a better result would have meant. He's such a sycophant of the national security state and the military that, even while he claims to be trying to analyze with integrity, he's not even willing at this point to acknowledge what the Vietnam War was: invasion and protracted slaughter by the U.S. So he simply left it hanging. He leaves it hanging because he can't make a forthright statement about the Vietnam War.

I think this is very common still and very pervasive: that somehow it was bad because we couldn't win. What's implied is that if a few million people in Indochina had been slaughtered — as they

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Protesters at the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C., demand media democracy. Hans Bennett photo

were — but the U.S. had ended up militarily triumphant, we would be just talking about what a wonderful war it was.

So this has the ripple effect on what has been called the "Vietnam Syndrome." Vietnam is a country where the death toll ran into the millions; where the poisoning of Agent Orange, Dioxin and other chemicals is still very real; where there are unexploded bombs, as is the case in Laos; where the U.S. hasn't bothered to clean up; and where, a quarter of a century ago, Jimmy Carter said that the U.S. did not need to make reparations because "the destruction was mutual."

So when we talk now about the scenarios for present U.S. military actions, we keep hearing the news media and the politicians say that they've "left behind the Vietnam Syndrome." They just got the wrong syndrome, because for them Vietnam was an abstraction, a poker chip in the big games that were being played.

The net result is an enormous pollution of the national discourse. The Vietnam Syndrome, unless we are delusional, has to be put in moral terms. The Syndrome has been defined by mass media and most politicians as: "We have to go in with clear objectives. If you can't go in with clear objectives, don't do it. If you can go in with clear objectives that are achievable and the war is winnable, then you just give it everything you've got. Kill as many people as you need to do it and get what you want, then God Bless America."

One of the tragedies we still need to work to mitigate and eliminate as best we can is the assumption that as long as the U.S. can "win" a war, it's a good war. When the first Bush said in 1990 that we "weren't going to have a Vietnam experience," that was a war shot. At first, a lot of people mistakenly saw it as a more peaceful attitude. What Bush basically meant was: "We're going to win." That's one of the worst areas of lasting propaganda that are still with us.

LIE TWO

Another major lie is that fighting for economic rights is to engage in something destructive called "class warfare." This realm of propaganda has many different damaging aspects to it. The other night I was watching the Donahue show on MSNBC and he was holding a town hall meeting in Houston with some former Enron employees. At one point, a union member spoke, and Donahue said (paraphrasing): "Unions get trashed so often, we have to realize that labor unions are crucial to our society." He said, "Unions are as American as apple pie."

As I listened, I realized that after decades of watching network television, I rarely heard anybody say that — least of all a host of a major TV show. The attacks on the notion of unionization have been so unrelenting in news media that it's a constant, pre-emptive strike across the bow.

When politicians, even in the least, begin to talk against corporate capitalism and to really strongly advocate for the low-income working poor and unemployed and homeless — especially in the context of corporate domination and enormous concentrations of wealth in this society — they are more often than not accused of engaging in class warfare.

The point was made by Adam Smith in his writings more than 200 years ago, that *labor creates all wealth*. Although it's not put this way, the message in so many different ways from mass media in this country is that wealth creates all labor. This is a useful myth for the corporate elite and the wealthy, but it really has nothing to do with reality. Everything is created by people's labor, and if you had somebody insisting loudly and pushing the point that labor creates all wealth, it's very difficult for that person to get much space in major media outlets.

One of the measurements of just how extreme the situation is, can be gauged by the enormous number of investment programs that have sprung up on cable television serving the investor, and the lionization and praise for the investor and others who have accumulated great wealth — the Bill Gates' of the world. This is really the flip side of contempt for working people, and I really think is one of the most pernicious things about our mass media, this implicit question which, of course, dovetails with commercialism, advertising, the consumerizing corporate pressure. The message is that you have to keep asking yourself how much you're worth and buying what you're worth. The meaning is dollars and what your financial assets are.

It's a fundamentally anti-humanistic message because it redefines what it means to be a human being. It redefines creativity by saying you can measure it with dollars and material accumulation. It redefines human worth by insisting that it be gauged according to dollars instead of more spiritual and ethically based values.

It's a club constantly pounding people wherever they tune into the news media, and that's even true of so-called non-commercial programming. You'll see a tremendous emphasis on investment and the stock market on PBS and on NPR, where they have the "NPR Business Update" on the hour. Right after the newscast, the next part of it is "Now on NPR's Business Update..." They don't have a daily "NPR Labor Update," let alone an hourly one. So it tells you about business preempting and trumping other realms of existence. It's not a new phenomenon, but it has become much more extreme in the past 10 or 15 years.

Much of the lies are told implicitly, which is really a powerful way to lie. Aldous Huxley wrote in his introduction to *Brave New World* that the "greatest triumphs of propaganda" involve "silence about truth." As long as the patterns in society are not openly remarked upon, that's a very strong message, which ends up being quite manipulative.

Essentially every daily newspaper in the U.S. has a business section, but none has a labor section. That is simply another message about what the priorities should be. NPR is so deferential to business but can't even set aside something that would be called a "labor update." It says a lot that every twitch and fluctuation of the Dow Jones Industrial Average and Nasdaq is big news. But how many people are waiting in emergency rooms for 4 to 6 hours because they didn't have the money to see a physician, how many people have suffered as a result, or how many injuries on the job took place and could have been prevented? We could have an hourly update on that. But the priorities are not there, obviously.

Bennett: *You've written a lot about racism in your books. I'm wondering how well you think white people within the progressive community have worked to address white privilege and challenge white supremacy?*

Solomon: With some exceptions, not very well. I think that sometimes the sloganeering has gotten in the way. Progressives generally know that racism is bad, and sometimes simply repeating the buzz phrases impedes rather than advances our ability to deal with racism. One of the things I think is so outrageous about racism in our society is the way in which it is intertwined with class. Race and class are intertwined.

I often wince when I hear about "The Problem of Race." That's often a phrase. I know Bill Clinton popularized the phrase. I don't think race is the problem. Rather, I think racism is the problem. The fact that we have different (what we call) races is not the problem. It's racism that's a problem. It's history that continues into today that is the problem. Slavery and all kinds of other less brutal, but still pernicious forms of brutality, which often utilize race as a lever.

We in progressive movements may sometimes mislead ourselves into thinking that because we have different values, we are largely able to deflect the impact of the society around us; but there are so many ways that the political economy and the cultural environment of our country shift and often distort our own lives and progressive institutions.

We don't have overt racial discrimination in this country as much as we have class discrimination. But at the same time, people of color generally don't have as much money as others in this country. So the failure to confront the violence of class — the multifaceted brutalities and injuries and gross inequities of class — it seems to me, is intertwined with the failure to confront racism.

We have a semi-Bantustan country to a large extent. The barriers are largely, though not totally, economic in that they frequently track on the basis of race. The extent to which people's prospects for advancement and even survival are restrained or enhanced by economic class and access to wealth.

All of those factors have an enormous effect on progressive organizations. We talk about building a new society within the shell of the old, but it's very difficult. There is certainly a lot of racism existing on the personal level and we — all white people — have that conditioning that we have to fight against and never accept.

Bennett: *Your talking about the intersections of race and class reminds me of your essays documenting the corporate media's massive distortion of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s revolutionary politics of 1966 and '67. Almost entirely erased from our historic memory is King's militant declaration that white supremacy could never be abolished until both capitalism/poverty and militarism were also abolished.*

Solomon: The reasons that the last few years of his life have been largely obliterated — which the mass media of this country have so much to do with — are linked to his broadening recognition of the interplay between poverty, racism, and militarism. In terms of corporate capitalism, Dr. King was a declared dissident and opponent. He did not believe in the accumulation of wealth and the continuation of poverty. He was anti-imperial. He was denouncing what the news media in this country today holds as sacred: the simultaneous accumulation of wealth and the immiseration of large numbers of people from lack of basic resources that can bring adequate nutrition, housing, education, health care and so forth.

That's why he's largely been reduced to a martyr on a postage stamp. That's why he is most promoted in the news media as someone who gave the "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963. When I think about where we are now and all of the really difficult and often upsetting world events that are occurring, I think of what he spoke about at the end of his life: "POVERTY, RACISM, AND MILITARISM." The last 35 years only deepened the relevance of what he was saying in 1967 and '68.

When I was just turning 17, I went to see the Resurrection City encampment, which was the last stop of the Poor People's Campaign, just a few weeks after Dr. King was assassinated. It's really quite disturbing to me that a third of a century later, those issues of widespread poverty and racism and huge expenditures for the military are all with us and with us with a vengeance. To me it verifies and underscores the prophetic nature of his work, which also can encourage us today, because as bad as things are, we have tremendous human resiliency that is manifested every day.

When I went to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre [Brazil] in early 2001, I was really thrilled to be around people from literally all over the planet who were organizing and fighting against what people there kept calling neo-liberalism: basically, imperial corporate policies. In the depth of the despair that I shared with many people at the election of George W. Bush, I was really overwhelmed by being around the energy, vitality, and optimism at the WSF. I think, in that sense, the perspective that Dr. King expressed with his words and his actions in the last years of his life is still very much alive and still should give us enormous resources for hope.

Bennett: *Could you tell me about your work with the Institute for Public Accuracy? How did the IPA begin and what is it doing today?*

Solomon: As somebody who has put a lot of effort into media criticism and worked from the outset with the media watch-group FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) as an associate, I certainly haven't felt that the mass media could be transformed into a very vibrant environment for democratic discourse. However, I have also come to feel during the 1990s that people on the left were

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generally not putting enough energy, creativity, and resources into fighting for space in a wide spectrum of media.

In the mid-1990s, I did some interviews at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C. As I talked to people that worked for the major PR operation, I was really struck by how they had millions of dollars to play with — 40 percent of the $20-million budget at the Heritage Foundation was going to some form of media outreach or public miseducation. Not only that, but they had an approach, supported by their funders, that said: "We're in this media battle for the long haul. We are going to build our media outreach, and we're going to find ways to communicate on a daily basis with media outlets left, right, and center, small, medium and large, across the country and beyond."

I walked out of their office building and thought: "These guys are getting away with murder. They have the money and the resources, they're not being challenged, and they have many corporate media outlets that are sympathetic to their conservative message. But they also (to give credit where credit is due) have really planned and followed through and planted their own poisonous propaganda crops."

From that experience, I got the idea for the IPA, and was fortunate enough to get some initial funding from the Stern Family Fund, what they call the Public Interest Pioneer Grant. It started with the idea that there are literally thousands of progressive experts in this country: people with enormous expertise. They're researchers, scholars, activists, and policy analysts. They know what they're talking about because day to day they're on the ground doing things, researching, and keeping up with a wide range of issues.

The IPA really was set up to help get those progressive voices into the media. We mean all kinds of media: left, center, and right media. We go to the small community radio station as well as the large TV and radio networks. We just feel that all of those media outlets should have access to and should be offered a wide range of progressive voices.

We soon found out what worked and what didn't. Initially, we thought we could simply put out news releases challenging the right-wing think tanks. We didn't find that very effective. But, over a course of years now, we've found that if we can, in a timely way, offer progressive voices to producers, editors, and reporters, it's possible to get a lot of people into news media.

We've put out more than 500 news releases since we were founded and went into operation in early 1997. We've found that not only are many progressives ready, willing, and able to be articulate experts to appear on radio and television and go through print interviews, but there are substantial cracks in the media walls. There are many radio stations and networks around the country that routinely use our news releases and call people on them and do extensive interviews as a result.

We now jump on breaking news on a regular basis. For instance, we've had many experts on national TV and radio recently in response to the two-day Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings about Iraq. It's been a very exciting process. We have an office in the National Press Building in D.C., and an administrative office in San Francisco. We have developed communications with literally thousands of progressives in our database.

So for me as a media critic, it's been very exciting to work as executive director of IPA. Any time there's a major breaking story that we jump on (and we do about three news releases a week), there are several thousand producers, editors, and journalists who within a matter of minutes receive it by blast fax or e-mail. That's been having some cumulative effects, so we feel this is definitely worth doing.

Bennett: *Is there anything you would like to add about the importance of media issues in campaigns for social change?*

Solomon: Yes. Media work is really central to social change. We can benefit by paying attention to what works on an ongoing basis throughout the society. In other words, if we evaluate our successes by what's in the *New York Times* day to day, then we are making a big mistake.

The right wing has at times been very successful because they believed in grassroots activity. Take, for instance, Pat Robertson's campaign in the late 1980s. The right wing fundamentalists did a hell of a lot of work at the grassroots: they networked, they burrowed into communities. Obviously I don't agree with their agenda, but the fact is that in some sort of perverse way, they believed in grassroots community action much more than a lot of the liberal funders who spread some money around to liberal and leftist organizations — but where the emphasis was so often on high-profile and expensive PR operations in New York or Washington oriented towards influencing elite opinion.

I have nothing against influencing elite opinion; but I think if you're going to make substantial social changes, you have to make substantial progressive movements at the grassroots. That's the only way you can sustain it. Otherwise, you're at the mercy of these elite individuals and institutions that hold so much sway and power because they have the bucks and the huge influence.

We should renew our active engagement with social change in communities across the country. It's a false choice as to whether we are going to do national organizing or grassroots organizing. We have to do all of it. One without substantial energy with the other is really not going to sustain itself effectively over the long term. Not only is democracy not a spectator sport, it is not about getting the elite to like you. It's not about persuading elites because you can make them feel comfortable with you. Democracy is about challenging elites by organizing at the grassroots.

If democracy is going to come into being in this country in a significant and far-reaching way, it needs to tear down the economic inequities that are making democracy in many respects impossible. That's obviously a huge task and it may often seem intangible, but the struggle for wide-ranging media discourse is part of a broader effort. We sometimes wonder why progressives don't have more effective media institutions. My answer would be that that's because progressives don't have a stronger movement in the country as a whole. So we are facing the challenges of building progressive media institutions at the same time that we need to build progressive movements as a whole. To separate one from the other is just not going to pan out.

Hans Bennett's photojournalism has been featured in several publications, including *INSUBORDINATION*, *AWOL*, *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, *LiP*, *Earth First! Journal*, and the *San Jose Mercury News*. He can be reached by e-mail: destroycapitalism@hotmail.com.

Just Cause Campaign

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these corporate landlords who come in, buy entire buildings, and kick everyone, including children and elderly persons, out of the building at once," Rapier said. "That's because they see an opportunity to make a profit."

In one case Rapier is working on involving a building on 84th Avenue, seven attorneys are on the other side, filing a blizzard of legal motions to snow under lawyers who represent tenants.

"This phenomenon that we're seeing is new," Rapier said. "When it's people against capital, they're going to do that."

Last year, when the dot-com bust and the economic downturn occurred, 3,500 lawsuits were filed against tenants for unlawful detainer, meaning the landlords were suing them to get renters to leave. In 2000, the number of unlawful detainer lawsuits was 4,000, according to Lane.

"But that does not count all the notices where all the people moved, because most of the time when people get a 30-day notice, they move," Lane said. "We always advise people to move because when they get an unlawful detainer filed against them, it ruins their credit. If they can't move, they have to fight and then the lawsuit gets filed," Lane said.

MEASURE EE, JUST CAUSE

Rapier tells of what's happening to tenants in an interview at the Just Cause campaign headquarters in downtown Oakland at 1602 Telegraph Avenue. Grandmothers, ministers, and unionists are joining tenant activists to get Measure EE, the Just Cause protection measure, passed on the Nov. 5 ballot.

Under Measure EE, landlords have to state a good reason for evicting a tenant, such as nonpayment of rent and breaking terms of the agreement. Measure EE's tenant protections would close the loophole in Oakland's poorly constructed and ill-enforced rent stabilization laws. Just Cause provides protection for responsible tenants against the unfair actions of landlords and management companies evicting just to increase profits. Oakland's current law does not protect tenants and often places them in a difficult and expensive situation to try to protect themselves from the unfair actions of landlords.

"We're going to pass EE. There's no question about it," activist and former mayoral candidate Wilson Riles, Jr. told Just Cause supporters at a rally on September 14. Oakland City Councilmember Nancy Nadel, who joined Riles at the rally, supports Measure EE. Councilmembers Danny Wan and Jane Brunner likewise support the Just Cause measure, Nadel said.

Nadel said Measure EE will give stable housing that children need to learn, stay in school, and not be displaced. Evictions have "terrible effects" on the health of the elderly, she said.

IMPACTS ARE REAL AND PERSONAL

"My husband, two children and I were evicted two times in three years for no reason. Why?" asked Meika Johnson, a Just Cause member. She added, "Fair and affordable housing is a right."

Sybil Carpenter was evicted last year when her landlord put her home up for sale. "The for-sale sign was up for something like two days, and then I turned around and found an eviction notice on the third day," Carpenter said.

Carpenter attended Just Cause Oakland speaker trainings to get involved and take a stand for affordable housing protections, particularly for African-American tenants.

"This type of greed rips families apart, rips communities apart," she said. "I can't say that my family has ever recovered."

Gladys Jones is an elderly African-American woman who was evicted from her home for no cause two years ago. Since then, Jones has been sleeping on a relative's couch. "I have swelling in my feet, and my eyesight isn't so good," Jones said. "I can't go out looking for a place to live, I don't know what I'm going to do, but we have to do something."

DOING SOMETHING

Among the organizations endorsing Measure EE are the Alameda County Central Labor Council; Californians for Justice; Centro Legal de la Raza; Coalition for West Oakland Revitalization; East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy; East Bay Housing Organizations; Eviction Defense Center; First Unitarian Church of Oakland; Oakland ACORN; Oakland Coalition of Congregations; People United for a Better Oakland; Service Employees International Union Locals 250 and 616; and the Youth Empowerment Center.

Volunteers from these organizations are calling voters, dropping literature at people's homes, and working to get information and voters out this fall on behalf of the Yes on Measure EE campaign. Volunteers are excited about the measure and encourage people to join them as they get the word out about Measure EE and the campaign to create a new era of fairness to replace the bull's eye that has been on Oakland renters' heads for decades.

"The number of people who have joined us who never were active before is astounding," said Just Cause's Andrea Cousins. "The issue of fairness is one that transcends ages, races, religions, and neighborhoods. People talk about family values, but we're actually doing something about it. We value the rights of families, seniors, the disabled, and all people to live in their homes without fear."

Volunteers can drop literature around their neighborhoods, work the phones, talking to voters, and help raise awareness and funds to get Measure EE enacted. For information, call the Measure EE campaign at (510) 763-5877 or online at www.justcauseoakland.org. The Yes on Measure EE/Just Cause Oakland Campaign Headquarters is located at 1601 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94612

UC Seizes Shopping Carts

from page five

He did manage to sort through and retrieve all his stuff; but, he complained, "Then I had to push it all the way back from down there back up here."

Gregory Daniel, an employee of the Public Works Department, is no happier about the messy pile of carts and possessions they have to keep in the yard for 90 days. He explained that the carts have to be removed from the streets if ordered by the city manager's office.

UC's Glenda Rubin denied that UC removes carts from the Park. "First of all, carts aren't brought into the park," Rubin said. "It's very rare that you will see a shopping cart in the park because that rule is well-enforced. So carts are not an issue in the park." I guess she doesn't go to People's Park very often.

Devin Woolridge is employed by UC as site coordinator for People's Park. He often gets caught in the middle. He would like the Park to be nice and orderly for community activities, and he is also sympathetic to the needs of homeless people who spend their days there.

"If we had more storage it would be a great thing," Woolridge says. "I believe it would solve a lot of the issues." But he said he is not trained or experienced in social service. "My background is program and recreation and taking care of the Park," he said. "I really have no solutions. These are really big issues."

Yes, these are even bigger issues than Woolridge is implying. They have to do with the quality of life of the whole community — of the poor and the well-off. They have to do with turning around a society that shuns homeless people into one that provides them housing. They have to do with recognizing everyone's right to have the physical and emotional sustenance for a satisfying life.

Interview with Father Bill O'Donnell

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have a long history of knowing that the graduates have been doing this to their own people for years and years. Right now there are more soldiers from Colombia at the School of Americas (or WHISC, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), than any other American nation.

Eric: *Why is Columbia sending so many students?*

Fr. Bill: Oil. That is the simple answer. U.S. interest in Columbia. They must bolster that regime. They will protect their oil lines and oil reserves. And therefore [to do this], the U.S. is training soldiers to terrorize their own people in Columbia. They train the paramilitary, too, at the school. It is the empire with its tentacles in a foreign country protecting its own interest.

Eric: *How does it benefit these countries to terrorize their own people?*

Fr. Bill: Most of these countries are organized under oligarchies, with plutocrats their great landowners. And the army serves as their police. So anybody who is a dissident to their kind of governing is an enemy. Any religious. Any political. Any social organization that goes contrary to their agenda and their purposes then becomes an enemy and will be threatened or killed or tortured.

Eric: *The literature from the School of Americas claims their school is a way to help Central and South American countries become more democratic.*

Fr. Bill: That's the lie. They have to have a rationale to exist. You have to tell the American people something. What are Americans so proud of? Their democracy. We enjoy some semblance of democracy. I'm not too sure about the reality of democracy here because we still have 40 million real poor people. Children are abused and hungry. So if democracy is supposed to take care of the least — you know, make everybody equal — I don't see it.

Anyway, we pretend we do have one and we pretend we export it into these Third World countries — they're Third World because we made them economically Third World. So it's a hoax actually. It's a hoax and the struggle is to reform our own nation to make it really democratic so people will want to have our kind of government. All people.

Never the oligarchies, never the plutocrats, never the great wealthy landowners and so on. They are always the enemy. That's why we have to take their wealth away from them and distribute it. Because they have no right, they have no human right to the wealth that they have.

Eric: *What kinds of things do you think the United States could do in terms of its foreign policy to help other countries to become more democratic. Would it be simply just leaving them alone?*

Fr. Bill: This nation, this government is incapable of doing what you ask. It has its own self-interest. Its self-interest is to be an empire so that they can accumulate more and more power through control of natural resources. And this empire needs surrogate nations to further their goal, which is to rule the world just like France, at one time, and Rome and Assyria. It's this human flaw that I gotta control you, a need — an addiction, I call it. And your job is to stop me. For your own freedom. For your own humanity.

So my little way — I first of all create a fence around my soul and that kind of power is not going to have me. They can have my body, which is what they are going to do for six months, and they are going to control my movements. But they will never have my soul. And that is a great victory. So I join with you in your passion to be free and a few of us link arms and we are going to be pretty free.

Eric: *Do you consider yourself a pacifist?*

Fr. Bill: I don't know. Put me in a corner. You come after me. What will I do? One time, years ago, a guy came in the house [i.e., the church rectory]. He had a stocking mask on and he held his arms out and said, "We got the house surrounded. Don't call the police." And you know on the street you'd never open your arms then, right? So I hit him. And I'd been preaching and trying to be nonviolent for ten years. And I thought, oh, I'll never make it because I was tested and blew it, you know. I didn't solve anything. The poor guy, you know, ran out. We had a little wrestling and I threw him down the stairs. I'm very embarrassed.

So I don't know if I'm a pacifist. I sure try to be. That's what I think life is. It's just trying to be as human as possible, and I'm going to fail because I'm flawed. It's the struggle that counts.

Eric: *It seems to me that pacifism is not necessarily a human quality anyway. It almost seems to be something that pacifists aspire to that is beyond the norm.*

Fr. Bill: I wasn't a pacifist; I was violent in sports, in my thinking. I justified wars. I wanted to be a Marine when I was a kid and kill, quote, Japs, unquote, and those dirty Nazis. It didn't work. Nothing worked. Every time I saw or used violence there was always someone more violent. So I'd lose that fight.

And then Martin Luther King came along and he was using nonviolent direct action against those incredible forces, wealth and police and laws, and he converted me. He introduced me to Gandhi and he reintroduced me to Jesus. We weren't raised in that theology of the gospel. We were justifying wars.

Eric: *As a Catholic?*

Fr. Bill: As a Christian and a Catholic and a priest, yeah. So I learned a whole new way of life. The nonviolent direct action. That's what this whole arrest in Georgia is about. It brought an incredible peace, an incredible purpose for struggle. And so, pain is paying off; whereas before when I justified violence it never paid off.

Eric: *How do you mean it's paying off?*

Fr. Bill: Well, for example, the victory we had in court. [The judge] gave us six months, but the incredible solidarity of the people on trial and their supporters! A guy would get up on the witness stand and our lawyer would say, "Do you have any support here?" and everyone in the courtroom would stand. It was incredible. When the judge finally, at 10:30 at night, banged the gavel and said, "this court is adjourned," everyone started singing. And we were just convicted for six months with fines!

And the marshal said, "Clear the court!" so we obediently left the court and went in the streets and started dancing. Can you imagine? See, so that is what I mean by the pay-off. The joy of doing the right thing. The joy of the truth. Holding onto the truth. You can't beat that. It's worth going to prison to have that.

Eric: *But it must be incredibly frightening to face the prospect...?*

Fr. Bill: You mean Bubba and the guards? Those are just guys. They got their problems. Just say, "No. No thanks." I don't have to get into their crap, into their garbage. If I don't buy into it, then I become either a solution because I'm not going to be a threat, or I become a problem — and it's theirs, not mine.

Eric: *Will you have a lot of support while you're in prison from the community?*

Fr. Bill: It's incredible, the support. I get about ten phone calls a day. I get letters. It's just remarkable. Boy, how do I keep this game going! It's like ball players coming out of the dugout. People cheering. Yeah, it's great. It's very, very supportive, but at the same time, it's very humbling. It is so humbling that I get to do this for anybody.

Eric: *I'm still kind of curious how you really started thinking about pacifism?*

Fr. Bill: See, I'm not sure what pacifism means. If it means doing nothing, I don't believe in that. I believe you use noncooperation in a very creative way. You really screw up the people that are exploiting. If it is an employer, you know, you meet with other people that are being exploited. You corroborate with nonviolent direct action by not going to work, or doing a boycott, or up to, but not including, destroying property. Just don't make it work. Do everything to make his game not work.

Eric: *Do you think religious people have a special duty to engage in civil disobedience?*

Fr. Bill: Everybody has. I mean an unfair law is an unjust law and you have to fight injustice. To be human, you can't allow it in your own heart. And so you disobey a bad law. It's a very good act. A very human act.

Direct Action Halts Evictions in Oakland

from page two

unflattering portrait of Stancil. I suggested to Sue Millar that it sounds like she must have known Stancil for a long time to know her so intimately. I then asked her how many times she has hung out with Stancil. Sue Millar became outraged at that point, saying that she has never met Stancil and could only rely on what her husband had told her. She went on to state that after 25 years of being landlords, they have never felt so persecuted.

Doris Stancil is still fighting her eviction with the CRR on her side to defend her from losing her home of ten years.

During this past summer of 2002, members of the CRR found themselves in a meeting with Leased Housing Director Joseph Villareal of the Oakland Housing Authority, making arrangements to seek assistance in relocating a Section 8 renter out of slum conditions that made her very ill from black mold exposure. The Housing Authority was very accommodating in helping the woman out of her plight into a new location after the CRR got their attention.

In early 1999, the CRR joined the fight to stop millionaire Andrew Lipnosky from evicting several single mothers who were advised by their attorneys that they had no rights left to them under Oakland rent laws to fight the evictions. They were packed and ready to go before the sheriff came by to evict them; but still, they had a ray of hope to stop the evictions with the members of the CRR at their side.

The CRR marched on Lipnosky's house and the manager's house as part of their direct action tactics. They submitted a list of demands for a new lease, including new drapes and carpeting for the units of the tenants facing eviction. Suddenly, at the last moment, the landlord backed down. The result of the CRR's direct action, demands, and media campaign to expose Lipnosky's enterprise was to stop the evictions dead in their tracks. As it turned out, the manager ran off in fear of exposure because it turned out that he was an escapee from a prison back in 1991. He went back to prison, but until the CRR showed up, he spent years as Lipnosky's henchman, frightening the tenants and pushing them around.

In another case in 2000, the CRR joined up with a couple named Margaret and Wally near 35th Street and Market in Oakland to defend them from the "Reverend Slumlord" who got religion when the members of the CRR showed up. The dump was really owned by a local reverend, who was exploiting the couple. No heat, exposed wiring, slum conditions and an eviction were just a few of the problems heaped upon Margaret and Wally by the reverend, and reversed by the CRR members.

Presently, the CRR has joined all the tenants of 1647 6th Avenue in Oakland, to help fight their evictions. The renters allegedly face eviction so that the new owners may replace the hot water heater, and do some minimal rewiring on an outdoor utility meter. The renters state that the hot water heater has already been replaced eight months ago, and even if it was to be replaced there is no need to evict renters who have lived there for years.

Bruce Parker, one of the residents facing eviction, states that his mother was forced out of town by greedy landlords in Oakland, and after residing for more than 10 years at the present location, he feels that the same is now happening to him. Parker now seeks community support from the CRR to fight his eviction, and his girlfriend Patricia is helping out.

A call to the new owners of the property, Steven H. Williams and Michelle Awai of Oakland, revealed a callousness and lack of understanding of the plight of the tenants they seek to evict.

My first call reached Michelle Awai, who started laughing when I asked about the evictions. She then tried to convince me that it was all perfectly legal and she quickly hung up on me. A second call moments later reached Steven H. Williams, who suddenly claimed that this was harassment and that he did not have to explain his actions to anyone. As if to intimidate me into silence, he asked if I would wish to speak to his attorney. He also quickly hung up on me.

After speaking with Sandra Miguel, the mother of two who now faces eviction after residing in the property for more than three years, and with eight-year resident Maria Rivas, also the mother of two children, the desperation of their plight was apparent. Rents are so high, they both asked where they are expected to go. In their attempt to seek community support against the evictions they have been in touch with the Campaign for Renters Rights, and the Eviction Defense Center.

Members of the CRR have already made the rounds to leave flyers and contact the renters of Williams and Awai in their effort to defend the tenants at 1647 6th Avenue in Oakland. Members of Just Cause have expressed an interest in joining the CRR to defend these renters, and several actions have been planned, in addition to ongoing efforts to defend Doris Stancil from eviction.

Interventions and direct action to defend renters from unfair evictions may be the wave of the future if the leaders of this movement have it their way. Even if a Just Cause Anti-Eviction Ordinance comes to pass in Oakland, the need for the CRR remains because greed is the evil temptation that landlords never seem able to resist. For now, evictions again are on the rise in Oakland, even as the Just Cause Anti-Eviction Measure nears the November 5th vote as Prop. EE.

The CRR meets the first Monday of each month. Those interested should call Campaign for Renters Rights at 510/595-5545. Just Cause may be reached at 510/763-5877. Call Eviction Defense Center at 510/452-4541. Lynda Carson is an Oakland renter and a member of Campaign for Renters Rights.

The Largest Gated Community in the Country

from page four

agenda of the equally right-wing San Francisco super rich to turn San Francisco into a little Manhattan owned by the top ten percent of extremely wealthy people. They believe in the Manhattan Institute studies that have claimed that discipline and punishment, not homes, are the solutions to homelessness.

As Welch puts it, "Homeless and lower-income tenants alike, are to be treated as supplicants, not full citizens of the community." These victims, like newly jobless dot-commers, fall into a gap between lowered wages and soaring rents created by the super rich, who victimize and judge them unworthy of having their fall broken by a social safety net.

Welch called HOPE "a sugar-coated poison pill." Welch and S.F. Tenant Union Director Ted Gullicksen concur that the super rich wish to change the dream of the multicultural melting pot in which "separate and distinct immigrant populations can first meet and settle and then mingle and mutate" in a city in which housing is as flexible as the population" — meaning "both apartments *and* homes." Said Welch, "Land use is the essence of politics in San Francisco."

Incredibly, Welch and Gullicksen say that the San Francisco super rich want this seven-by-seven-mile city for themselves, transforming the City into the exclusive preserve of the affluent.

Welch said, "Their definition of multiculturalism is where you can go to any restaurant featuring a variety of the world's cuisines." They plan to use HOPE to run the tenant population out of rental spaces in the City and change San Francisco voting patterns. They have even figured out how many years this will take.

Just as they plan to use Care Not Cash to make homeless people disappear by attrition or death, they have created HOPE as a condo-conversion scheme to control who lives here and who works here, and to transform San Francisco to a City of the Rich in 25 years or less.

COMMITTEE ON JOBS

Welch reported that he has heard Nathan Nayman say as much. Nayman is the executive director of the Committee on Jobs, the organization funded by the San Francisco super rich and big businesses to lobby for their interests at City Hall. Nayman and Mark Mosher, the main lobbyist for the Committee on Jobs, represent the interests of the likes of The Gap's Don Fisher, Walter Shorenstein, Levi Strauss, Macy's, Bank of America, and various presidents and CEOs of big corporations. Every highrise in the financial district is a member of the Committee on Jobs, as is every big landlord in the city.

The Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), representing big commercial and residential landlords, is notorious for low wages and for fighting all tenant initiatives. "BOMA always puts a big chunk of money against anything tenants put on the ballot," said Gullicksen.

According to Welch, the enormous effort currently under way by the Committee on Jobs, BOMA, the Golden Gate Restaurant Association, and the hotel owners to get HOPE on the November 2002 ballot is explained by the November 2000 election of the new district-based Board of Supervisors. This election caused a major shift in political power in San Francisco, dramatically reducing the influence of business elements.

"Corporate San Francisco's agenda is to remove the disparate, unruly, incredibly diverse, populist culture that has given San Francisco much of its flavor and political history in the last 50 years," said Welch. These corporate interests need the power of the Board of Supervisors to remove the "economically irrelevant" population from San Francisco and replace it with businesses and affluent residents.

It is troublesome to Corporate San Francisco that the Board of Supervisors can approve or disapprove million-dollar developments, and that they must go through an election process that can be hijacked by this cacophonous crowd. Because the big-business interests lost in 2000, they now realize they can't defeat each supervisor in their districts. Welch has actually heard Nathan Nayman say, "What we're going to have to do is change the San Francisco voter."

Gullicksen confirmed Welch's view that "the reason the Committee on Jobs are the ones putting all their funding money, a million dollars, on Proposition R, the HOPE initiative, is that they know they are stuck with district elections, and initiatives that pass, and all they have left is to change the population of the voters. Their goal is to displace and get rid of all the low- and moderate-income tenants in the City."

Commented Welch, "Care Not Cash tries to transform San Francisco by altering the way it provides services to poor people. HOPE would dramatically increase the potential for renter households in rent-controlled apartments to be displaced by people with more money. If we want to change the politics of this Board of Supervisors, we have to first remove their electoral base. We do that by going after rent control and social services. From this point of view, Chris Daly is supervisor because nonprofit service providers and low-income tenants in rent-controlled buildings voted for Chris. Since we can't beat Chris with somebody else, we've got to remove his electoral base."

The real connection between Care Not Cash and HOPE is precisely that both are aimed at changing the City's electoral base by driving away low-income residents.

The essence of Care Not Cash is to break the solidarity and the equal footing between the person in need of a social service and the person providing it. The assumption behind Care Not Cash is that poor people are different because they are needy; if they do not have money, they are not to be considered full citizens.

"That is the same line being touted by HOPE," said Welch. "There's this intense image of tenants as parasites." The Committee on Jobs stokes the perception that only homeowners give to communities and neighborhoods, and care about the future of our children.

Gullicksen agrees, saying, "Whenever Nancy Tucker, a landlord activist working for small property owners, or Joe Capko, a tenant patsy for big landlords, have been at an event I attended, they look at me and the other tenants there with absolute hate in their eyes. It's very odd."

Welch said, "The vilification of tenants by the supporters of HOPE is really quite astounding. It is, in essence, a denial of common San Franciscan citizenship." Their belief system is that if you're homeless, or if you're a tenant, you're not a San Franciscan. The Committee on Jobs is pumping up the emotion behind the reactionary supporters of these initiatives.

HOPE seems to represent explicit class warfare. At the present legal limit of 200 condo conversions per year, it would take many centuries to evict every San Francisco tenant. HOPE would allow landlords to evict tenants faster because it increases the number from 200 to approximately 3,500 a year. That would enable property owners to sell off the units to the rich, and San Francisco could be ethnically and economically cleansed.

"That's absolutely correct," stated Gullicksen. "In 25 years, this measure will get rid of half of the rental units in the City. They will keep the 3,400 conversions. That's good enough. They don't have to get rid of every single last tenant, just half of them. When you think of the massive change we are talking about — 25 years to completely transform San Francisco into a city for the super rich — it's actually a very short time."

HOPE is funded and led by the Committee on Jobs, which provided all the campaign money — around $115,000 as of the June reporting period. They've hired campaign consultants, Barnes, Mosher, and Whitehurst, to lead the campaign. Mark Mosher is the main lobbyist for the Committee on Jobs. Their sheer amount of money makes the Committee on Jobs formidable. Viewing their financial filings on the Ethics website reveals a "bottomless pit of money." They paid a high price getting HOPE on the ballot, using paid signature gatherers who earned $2.00 per signature and collected the bulk of them.

"But," said Gullicksen, "The Yes on R people fought the endorsement war part of the campaign, and lost. On August 21, 2002, the Central Committee for the Democratic Party came out against HOPE."

So, the Committee on Jobs has gone a'courting by working on various interest groups to subtly change their perceptions — Chinese voters in the Sunset/Richmond, select African-Americans with business interests, the wealthy gay men of the Plan C. Board, the Fang's *Examiner* and editors Frank Gallagher and Nancy Tucker, who has the double advantage to the Committee on Jobs of being an original founder of the Small Property Owners Association.

Welch explained, "The business community has courted the Chinese community as a natural ally... *The Examiner*, and the Fang newspapers, including *Asian Week*, project the image of the Chinese as solidly middle class. Reading these papers, one would not know that the overwhelming majority of Chinese people in San Francisco are tenants.

"They have failed in their attempt to project the gay community as this upwardly mobile, middle-class population with no political reason to make allies with people of color or environmentalists." A look at voting patterns in the gay community reveals political support for common issues with lower-income people.

Then there is Plan C. Supporters of HOPE and Care Not Cash, the Plan C Board of Directors is predominantly upper-middle-class gay men. Plan C is of pivotal importance as a group that has narrowed its focus from sexual orientation to money. Thus, they are able to support Tony Hall, a right-to-life proponent, in his class-war initiative, HOPE. Welch thinks that Sup. Tom Ammiano must be full of consternation, wondering how it can be that, in the end, all politics is reduced to class based on money.

The Committee on Jobs, along with Getty-Burton interests, appears to be using both the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*, with the Fang's blessing, to attack nonprofits like the Coalition on Homelessness, which defends the rights of the homeless poor, and the Housing Rights Committee, which defends rent control and the interests of low-income tenants. The *Examiner* hired Frank Gallagher, former lobbyist for PG&E, last fall. In an apparent attempt to get the Housing Rights Committee defunded, Gallagher wrote articles suggesting the organization was misusing taxpayer money to work for ballot initiatives favoring the interests of tenants. According to Gullicksen, "The City did an audit and gave HRC a clean bill of health." A similar attack on the Coalition on Homelessness has led to the loss of some of their funders.

The vociferous desperation in the fight to realize the dream of property ownership and control over San Francisco housing stock is captured in the personality and behavior of one of the more colorful characters of the pro-landlord forces: Nancy Tucker, founding member of the Small Property Owners Association.

Tucker, who claims she has a 30-year journalism career and apparently once worked for the *Army Times*, edits for the *Examiner*, motivated by pure zeal. Housing activists speculate she trades stories back and forth with Gallagher, an *Examiner* editor and former lobbyist for PG&E. Gallagher does hit pieces on nonprofit agencies and progressive Supervisor Chris Daly. Nancy Tucker promotes HOPE.

Gullicksen said, "With the help of Nancy Tucker, Small Property Owners turned the *Examiner* into their own little newsletter for HOPE." *The Examiner* Opinion page, for Aug. 16, 2002, under "City Voices," displays a staggering total of eight articles about HOPE and editorials promoting the values of the Small Property Owners Association (SPOA).

Small property owners are landlords of buildings with two to four units, not impacted by HOPE. HOPE will impact only the larger buildings. Gullicksen said he believes their differences with tenants on land-use issues is simply a matter of "plain old conservative ideology." They want tenants gone. The SPOA would vote conservatively on issues like bonds and taxes as well as social issues.

Tucker has come to symbolize for me the high paranoia gripping San Franciscans who are searching for fool's gold in a new rush to vote out rent control and convert their apartments to condos. A rent-controlled apartment would allow them to save for a home, but when HOPE effectively repeals rent control, rents will skyrocket. The very wealthy know that only they will be able to afford a space in San Francisco. The trick within a trick is that HOPE will do exactly the opposite of what it says.

The SPOA share with the super rich a vision of San Francisco as "the largest gated community in the country." The Committee on Jobs promotes the SPOA vision of San Francisco as a suburb with *suburban values, conservative fiscally and socially. People with lots of money. No* homeless lying on sidewalks. No poor people. Not even tenants. Just a nice place where you can raise your children in a free-standing house with a green yard and a picket fence.

Property owners are less inclined to vote for tax increases or bond measures. They vote against adequate funding for homeless services or affordable housing, and in favor of measures that drive homeless people out of town because their very existence brings down property values.

Tucker's career as a pro-landlord activist reveals a person obsessed with property rights and anger and hatred towards marginalized groups she believes are stealing her little piece of San Francisco. This attitude is widely shared by the pro-landlord forces trying to force low-income people out of the City altogether.

The case of Lola McKay shows the cruel extremes to which landlords will go in their vendetta against renters. McKay, an 83-year-old woman, faced an Ellis Act eviction in the last days of her life. She received anonymous letters saying, "Get the hell out," and "Go buy cat food if you can't afford rent." Greatly distressed, Lola showed these letters to Raquel Fox, a lawyer for the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, who participated many times in pickets in front of Lola's house and knew the elderly tenant personally. Fox said she believes this trauma contributed to Lola McKay's death just before she could be evicted.

McKay's fate shows the inhumanity of this effort to drive low-income people out of San Francisco. Care Not Cash would reduce homeless GA recipients to abject poverty and misery. The HOPE initiative would result in the eviction of countless renters. Paired together, these twin initiatives threaten to recreate Lola McKay's tragic fate a thousand times over.

Mama's Love: A Beacon of Light in the Tenderloin

Mama dealt with being poor every day. When you are poor there are no days off. She fed and gave clothing to many of us out there living on the streets. She always shared with someone.

by Valerie Schwartz,
PoorNewsNetwork



Collage of Lula B. "Mama" Seymour, a loving presence in the Tenderloin. Graphic by PNN staff. Image courtesy of the Seymour Family.

I used to find myself in awe of Mama sometimes, that she kept her faith intact. It just blew my mind that a homeless senior woman, alone, could deal with life out there, knowing how harsh and just plain miserable it can be, and maintain a sort of grace.

About two years ago on a somewhat hazy morning in the Tenderloin, the sun was ambivalent about trying to make an appearance on the 200 block of Hyde Street. I was reclining against the fence. I was sick and could barely move; and the light that shone on me was from Lula Bell Seymour, better known as Mama.

"What's wrong, Sugar?" she asked me with that sweet voice that was always maternal, and then added, "It's not like you to be laying down out here."

I had a staff infection that was attempting a coup d'état on my right leg, which I have ongoing vascular trouble with. Mama went to her van and got out some aspirin, peroxide, ointment, and some clean socks and jeans for me. I managed to get up and go to the store to buy some band-aids with money she had given me.

We talked for awhile and when I felt strong enough, she sent me packing down the street, care-package in hand, with instructions to, "Go get cleaned up and come back up here." Although I barely had the energy, I followed the instructions given and back to the corner I went. This is only one of many times that Mama helped me.

I can't remember exactly when it was that I met Mama, an African-American elder who had resided in the Bayview-Hunters Point district of San Francisco for several years while working as a housekeeper for Children's Hospital, among other labor-intensive jobs, before she became houseless, or what we at POOR call, "Vehicularly Housed." I had seen her around the Tenderloin and adjoining Market St. area for a while.

I would give a "guesstimate" that it was the spring of 1998 when we first actually talked. It was on the corner of Hyde and Turk. This corner was a veritable sidewalk mall whose proprietors were primarily homeless people. I have lived in the Tenderloin neighborhood for 22 years and I know it very well. It has a high rate of crime, addiction, and despair, as most areas of poverty do.

On that fateful day, my co-worker was inside the copy shop next to the Midori Hotel at Turk and Hyde streets getting copies made for my boss at the time; we did all the maintenance, painting, and whatever else was needed to be done in a nearby apartment building. As I waited, I sat on a milk crate playing some blues tunes on my guitar, when Mama stepped out of the front door of her home, a dark green van. She made eye contact with me and gave a short but hearty little laugh while straightening her wig and said, "Hello, I'm Mama. That's what we need around here. — a little music to soothe ourselves, praise the Lord."

Mama then started, while humming, to set up her little sidewalk re-creation of a Goodwill store. She set down some blankets and then set the clothes and miscellaneous items she had to sell on top of them. We talked for a few minutes as she swept the sidewalk around her "store." Then it was time for me to get back to work.

After our first discussion, most every time I was on the corner, Mama and I would talk or exchange our "hellos" in passing. We forged a friendship on that corner. I started taking all the things that the former tenants had left behind or threw out and gave them to her so she could sell them, rather than take it to the dump. Eventually my boss became ill, was hospitalized, and I was back on the street again. Mama helped me through those times when I needed it and when I didn't.

Mama dealt with being poor every day. When you are poor there are no days off. She fed and gave clothing to many of us who were, and still are, out there living on the streets. I remember how she used to pull out her little barbecue grill and make everything she could with what she had: soups, a pot of beans, sometimes chicken. She always shared with someone.

Mama would not allow people to get high or sell dope next to her van. I remember her frustration with people sometimes. She would never curse, but prayed instead. Mama always prayed; she prayed for everyone, myself included, and pray she did. Her faith was unyielding.

There were days when she was hurt and angry with me, for I was such a slave to my addiction. She wouldn't speak to me, or would tell me to come back later, and that was enough to shame me in ways that others could not. I'd walk away and she would tell me, "You got to fight those demons, girl... now go." And as I walked away, I could hear her praying...

Rarely would anyone talk crazy to Mama, for most of us out there respected her and helped her in return. We wasn't havin' no one "dis" Mama! I had seen the police give her tickets for selling her wares on the sidewalk without a permit. Some of them left her alone, but when she would see them coming she got busy and put everything away quickly, and then they might still give her a parking ticket.

I know that some of the police used to hassle her for living in her van. Mama did not want to live in a "care facility;" and, unfortunately, I am afraid that she, as many elders do, felt it was not a choice.

As a person who is disabled, has been homeless, and is poor, I have to stop and think about choices. Choices for elders, for the poor and disabled, are not always what I would consider to be real choices. They mean having to choose between two or more evils. These "choices" are offered by systems that perpetuate poverty.

Is it a choice for a person to live in a care facility where they are subjected to many different kinds of neglect or suffer a houseless poverty? Is there a choice for elders who are forced into conservatorship by the county, such as Beatrice Sloan of Oakland, another African-American elder confined to a care facility and robbed of her assets by government programs set up to "care" for elders. Writes my colleague Ashley of POOR, "The nursing home industry is another form of big business disguised as *hellthcare*." Thus our elders are losing what they have worked earnestly and hard to keep and maintain: A family, a good home and integrity.

When I had the pleasure of attending Mama's memorial service last week, presented by the Faithful Fools Street Ministry, where several family members and friends spoke and presented words of grace in Mama's memory, more questions arose: Why did Mama have to leave after residing in her Bayview-Hunter's Point home for so long? What made her "choose" to live in her van? Some reports say that she was evicted due to an Owner-Move-In-Eviction. Some say it was her choice because she didn't want to live in a care facility. Was Mama facing a possible case management or conservatorship?

Being told that she was a "very independent person," for me, does not answer the question, because of course, for poor folks, there is always the issue of shame. This society tells us it is bad to be poor, that something is wrong with you — not the people evicting you, not the system taking your assets, redlining your districts, employing you at nothing wages, and then criminalizing your poverty.

Being that I was in the dregs of my addiction, I used to find myself in awe of Mama sometimes, that she had good boundaries and kept her faith intact. It just blew my mind that a homeless senior woman, alone, could deal with life out there, knowing how harsh and just plain miserable it can often be, and maintain a sort of grace, you might say.

Yet, she never gave up. On many days, she inspired me to make it through another day in hell with just one of her beautiful grins, her intense, smiling brown eyes, and her saying, "You stay outta trouble."

There have been times since I have been in treatment that I wanted to go talk to Mama and let her know that I was okay. Today I want her to know that some of her prayers most assuredly have been answered, that I have been clean and drug-free for a year, and how very grateful I am for her friendship, love, and boundaries that I now understand.

Mama's presence and spirit was always a beacon of light in the tempest of the Tenderloin and she will be missed and remembered by many.

Mama will be included in the *Poverty Heroes Anthology* to be released by POOR Press in December. To visit the Memorial Green Van, call the Faithful Fools at (415) 474-0508 or go to the corner of Hyde and Turk Street.

My Mama, My Ancestor

by A. Faye Hicks/Po' Poets Project

I remember my Mama
In the Bean field, The Potato field
Sending us to school to learn our ABC's
Keeping the Camp Fires burning
We did not know much about city livin'
In fact I didn't know much of anythin'
Except a Mother's Love
If we did without
It was with Style and Grace
No Complaints
Doing without was no disgrace
As I sit here reminiscin' —
Life goin' on by
I have Strength and Courage
Instilled in me!
For times of sorrow
And times of joy
Although I shed tears, I Radiate Joy
When I am Low
I remember my Mama

THE JOURNEY

by Claire J. Baker

Let us be forever ready
to disarm injustice and inequality —
march together on behalf
of the poor, AIDS, peace;
enough homes & potatoes for ALL;
march for more honest CEOs,
landlords, politicians; for safe
streets & safe kids, humanely
havened elders & stray animals.

Because there are needs
& causes enormous, let us go forth —
you as you are, I as I am.
On social justice journeys
be neither fox nor sacrificial lamb.

Street Stuff

by Claire J. Baker

Do you pray
or
Do you prey?